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"GO! REMEMBER I AM A WOMAN, MADE DESPERATE BY MY WRONGS," SAID MISS VILLIERS, WHITE WITH PASSION.

SHE, OF THE RUDDY LOCKS.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

"VIRGINIE VILLIERS is twenty-eight if she is a day," said Louise Fawcett, uprearing her dark head. "I speak with authority."

"Well," smiled Freda Sessions, "may I bear my increasing years equally well! Miss Villiers has scarcely the appearance of two-and-twenty."

"You are remarkably innocent," answered Louise, with the least little bit of a sneer; "of course she owes her youth to art. No woman of her years could appear so juvenile without recourse to cosmetics, elixirs, dyes, etcetera. Virginie is very skilful in their use, that is all."

"I don't believe there is anything artificial in Miss Villiers, and my only wonder is that some lucky man has not appropriated her."

Louise Fawcett laughed disagreeably.

"We will suppose the men are wiser than you, Freda. Virginie is just a little bit too clever to

please the ordinary man, and she is not rich enough to tempt one to wear the matrimonial yoke, so the chances are that she will live and die in single blessedness."

"I hate to hear you talk in that fashion, Louise. All men are not mercenary, and I am sure Virginie is most bewitching when she chooses. Mr. Sunderland evidently admires her, despite the rebuffs he receives."

"Virginie will only repulse him to a certain point," answered Miss Fawcett, with slightly flushed cheeks, "she is wise in her generation, and past experience has taught her not to experiment too far. She was always a clever hypocrite, and she delights in mystery. I want to know where she vegetated for fifteen months some three years ago. She is extremely reticent on that point."

"Perhaps she considers questions are impertinent," said Freda, rather coldly, "and the mere fact that she is Mrs. Holland's guest is sufficient proof of her respectability, if, indeed, a Villiers needed such a guarantee."

She rose as she spoke, and advancing to a window which overlooked the lawn and espalier walk, saw two people approaching.

The one was a tall, distinguished-looking man, apparently of some thirty odd years; not in the least handsome, but yet his face was attractive by reason of its power and noble pride. The eyes were very dark (no one could safely say if they were grey or black) and deep set, the chin square, the mouth firm yet gentle withal, and but slightly shaded by the black moustache.

His companion was, perhaps, more noticeable than he, despite her somewhat diminutive stature. Her complexion was of dazzling fairness, and though there was no hint of colour in her cheeks she did not give one the impression of delicacy. Her eyes were deep violet, the black eyebrows most delicately marked, the lashes long and curled.

But what drew one's attention to her most immediately was her hair—such a wealth of it there was, and of such a rare shade.

Her enemies—for Miss Villiers had many—called it red or sandy; but it was neither. It was really that pure bright auburn so rarely seen, so often attributed to the luckless, wicked Mary Stuart, and in the sunlight it shone like burnished gold.

Her features, without being regular, were re-

markable for their delicacy and mobility. The upper lip was short, the mouth spirited and proud, for all the bright smile which sometimes hovered there.

As she looked, Freda Sessions drew a deep breath. "She is exquisite," she said, and the big, handsome brunette now standing beside her, answered, jealously:

"If white cheeks and scarlet hair constitute beauty I won't question your taste. I can only say it is widely different to mine!"

Mr. Sunderland had now brought his companion quite close to the house, and the words spoken in his grave mellow voice reached Louise and Freda where they stood.

"And you will not promise to ride with me into Fulbeck Buzzard?"

"If you will form a party," answered Miss Villiers, "I have no objection; but *tête-à-tête* rides are such very tedious affairs."

He murmured something they could not hear, but they could easily guess its import by the faint shell-pink flush which for a moment stained the whiteness of the softly-rounded cheeks. Then Virginia's voice, clear, sweet, incisive, said,—

"I never change my mind, although by such a confession I lay myself open to very unpleasant insinuations. You know the old proverb has it, 'Wise men change their minds sometimes; fools never,' and her silvery laugh smote the air half-mockingly. No, I will not hear another word of protest or entreaty. *Au revoir!*"

And dismissing him unceremoniously she entered the room by the French window.

She just glanced at Louise Fawcett as she stood with her hands flower-filled; but it was Freda she addressed.

"I had no idea it was so late. We have barely time to dress for dinner."

"Then I propose we beat a retreat to our respective apartments," said Freda, "my toilet is always a matter for tribulation;" and she tripped away.

Virginia gathered her flowers together in leisurely fashion, Louise watching her morosely.

"Are not you coming?" she questioned, presently, "or do you think it unnecessary to add to your charms?"

The violet eyes met the black ones calmly as their owner said,—

"I am not so foolish as to scorn the adjuncts of dress; no woman, however good-looking, can afford to do that," and she followed in Freda's wake.

Most of the guests had gathered in the drawing-room when she reappeared, and there was a little stir of excitement as she entered.

She was looking very beautiful in a soft white surah silk gown, which Louise truthfully, but maliciously, remarked had done duty a dozen times and more.

At her breast she wore a cluster of crimson and purple verbena; but neither gem nor flower adorned the masses of hair, coiled low upon the nape of the milk white throat.

Bruce Sunderland went at once to her side.

"You are wearing my flowers," he said, scarcely above his breath, "what may I augur from that?"

"That I am keenly alive to the beauty of contrast; see how much they enhance the whiteness of my gown," she answered, very steadily and serenely.

"Did you only think of that?" he asked, almost imperiously. "Was there no remembrance of the giver in your mind? You must tell me so much."

"I do not acknowledge the necessity; and I must again remind you that I dislike to be rendered conspicuous—"

"Thank you, Major Cullam," as a very obese gentleman advanced, with a florid bow. "I believe Mrs. Holland has given you the very disagreeable task of taking me in."

He began to expostulate with her, but, with a light laugh, she interrupted his speech, and, placing the tips of her fingers upon his arm, preceded Louise and Bruce to the dining-room.

The handsome brunette glanced at her partner, then remarked, tentatively, "I suppose you, in common with other men, admire Miss Villiers?"

"More than I can say. She is unique," he answered coolly.

"Yes. And there is perfect rage for red hair just now."

"I confess I am obtuse, Miss Fawcett; I really cannot understand your last remark. May I ask to what it has reference?"

The blood mounted to her face. "Oh!" she said, with a slight laugh, "I am sorry if, unconsciously, I have offended or hurt you. Of course, being a prejudiced party, you will designate that scarlet hair, auburn, chestnut, ruddy gold, anything rather than give it an opprobrious name?"

If he had shown the least sign of anger, she would have cared less, but his manner was imperturbable in the extreme, as he answered, "I rather like the *Titan's* tint! Miss Fawcett, I am very much afraid your artistic perceptions are not keen, and that you have never cultivated them."

She had no reply ready, but presently she returned to the attack. "I suppose you have known Miss Villiers a very long time? Remember, I only judge from appearances; the very easy relationship existing between you can only point to a life-long friendship."

"As a matter of fact, I never met Miss Villiers until I came to Stanville," answered Bruce, with a mischievous gleam in his deep-set eyes, which Louise did not see.

She was regarding Virginia (now her *vis-à-vis*) with eyes the reverse of friendly, and, slowly, the words dropped from her lips.

"She is very mysterious, and lives quite alone, with the exception of an old servant who is reported to be 'crazy.' Once the Villiers were influential people; but they have all died out except Virginia. There was a brother, but, I think, he did something dreadful; at all events he disappeared and has neither been seen nor heard of since. Miss Villiers herself has only a beggarly annuity of one hundred and fifty six pounds. I have been told she has to make her own gowns."

"Then Worth must look to his laurels," answered Bruce, with his eyes bent steadfastly upon his plate. "After your disclosure no one shall persuade me that Englishwomen do not know how to dress."

"Miss Villiers should feel flattered! For my own part, were I a man, I should not wish my wife to sink to the level of a milliner or modiste."

The dark eyes met hers fully. "A lucrative employment is not to be despised; and the man or woman who fears to acknowledge an honourable trade, honourably followed, is only worthy of contempt. By your report, Miss Villiers would make a poor man an excellent wife."

Not another word did Louise say then, but when the ladies were gathered together in the drawing-room, she leaned across to Virginia, saying, "You ought to be an extremely uplifted personage, instead of the most unassuming. You are far and away the most notable maid of Stanville—what a pity that you so long hid your light under a bushel!"

"I do not understand; I was never remarkable for self-depreciation."

"You say so now," smiled Louise, well aware that two or three ladies of uncertain age were straining their ears to catch the gist of her speech; "but I suppose you are not prepared to deny that you won your popularity by living the life of a hermit three years ago. Some foolish folks reported that you had suffered a cruel disappointment—I leave you to guess the nature of it—and that you sought relief in solitude—but as I know you are not susceptible, I have doubts about the truth of the report!"

The beautiful face neither paled nor quivered, as the sweet voice made very audible answer, "I am grateful to you, Miss Fawcett, that you do not credit me with such sickly sentimentality. You, being of a congenial nature, will readily understand how trying it is to endure the questions and society of bores—I sought relief from them. Excuse me, but Miss Sessions wishes me to accompany her in 'Love's Old Sweet Song.'"

## CHAPTER II.

"You are returning home to-morrow, I understand, Miss Villiers," said Bruce, as he leaned over her chair, the following day. "We shall be a dull party without you. Won't you be merciful, and yield to Mrs. Holland's entreaties to prolong your stay?"

She shook her head.

"I must really go. You would not have me outstay my welcome!" with a smile, as though she knew how unlikely a thing that would be.

"And I am joining our friends at Burkle-on-Sea in the course of three weeks. Then I have frequent opportunities of seeing Mrs. Holland; my house is but two miles out of Stanville."

"If I might hope for admission—," he began, when she interrupted him gaily,—

"Oh, by all means, drive out with Mrs. Holland, and see the nakedness of the land. I don't know how it is, but most people unacquainted with my history imagine I am a favourite of Fortune. On the contrary, I am a very humble individual, living in a most unpretentious style; and I dislike to figure as a grandee, objecting greatly to borrowed honours."

"I shall avail myself of your kindness," answered Bruce, his eyes taking in every detail of her loveliness. "I am afraid I shall not even wait Mrs. Holland's leisure; I am a most impatient fellow."

"Most men are that," retorted Virginia, shaking out her blue skirts; "it is their natural infirmity. Have you seen Mrs. Holland's *La France* this morning? It is a perfect picture. No! You do not know where to find it? Oh, but this is culpable wickedness. It's scent alone should have attracted you."

"I want to atone immediately for my 'culpable wickedness'; will you be my guide to this much belauded, most exquisite bush?"

"Come," said Virginia, answering smile with smile. "I am glad to see you willing to be educated up to the modern standard, although I am not a worshipper myself of High Art;" and she led the way to the roseroy, which was the pride and delight of Mrs. Holland's heart.

Bruce professed to be entranced with his surroundings, but the most casual observer would have seen that his eyes rarely left the exquisite face beside him; that so long as Virginia remained with him, he had no thought that was not filled by her. If she knew this she made no sign; indeed, admiration was so common to her that she wearied of it, half doubted if ever it were real, and felt a pitying contempt for those who offered it at her shrine.

Presently, with a slightly impatient gesture, she said,—

"Let us go further; it will be pleasant by the river this morning, and I hear the *Water Witch* coming in."

He was loath to leave this sweet solitude, but something in her manner prevented him saying so—Miss Villiers was at times very unapproachable—and he followed in her wake to the water edge, which Mrs. Holland's trim little steamer was now nearing.

It was all gold and white. Through the windows one caught glimpses of ferns and flowers, of dainty hangings and luxurious lounges. On deck were several girls and men, who had ostensibly been to drink the mineral waters at Little Stanville.

"It was horribly nasty," said Freda Sessions, as she ran up the plank to the shore. "I wish you had seen the grimaces we all made, Virginia; it was better than a Drury-lane pantomime, which is saying a good deal. But we all professed to be enchanted, and some of us are prepared to swear we are already immeasurably more robust. Why, I declare you are not listening," as Virginia's eyes strayed beyond her, and rested upon Louise Fawcett and her companion.

Her face was curiously white and looked suddenly old; she tried once or twice to speak, but her lips refused to obey her will, and her tongue was parched.

Freda noticed nothing, but Bruce, fearing she was suddenly ill, bent over her solicitously.



That simple action seemed to recall her to herself, for she presently asked,—

"Who is Miss Fawcett's partner?"

"Oh, don't you know? He is Bernard Boyd, the popular preacher. Handsome, isn't he? We picked him up at the Wells, and very good company he is. I don't usually care for the clerical element in a pleasure-party, but he is really a credit to his cloth;" and she passed on with a troop of light-hearted girls.

With an evident effort, Virginia lifted her eyes to her companion's face.

"I was stupidly startled," she said in rather uncertain tones; "I could hardly believe the evidence of my own senses. I thought Mr. Boyd was very far away indeed; and when I knew him, he was an *obscure*, not *popular*, preacher."

There was something in her manner so altogether at variance with its usual *sang froid*, that Bruce was chilled. Could it be that Virginia cared for this handsome stranger? Was this the reason why she so persistently turned a deaf ear to all her wooers?

Louise and Boyd were very near them now; behind came Mrs. Holland; then, with something like desperation in her looks, Virginia advanced. To say that Mr. Boyd appeared surprised at meeting her there is to state facts very mildly, his pale dark face became suffused with a crimson flush; his black eyes flashed a question to her as he began, "Miss—" and she interrupted quietly:—

"Villiers; you have evidently forgotten my name. How do you do, Mr. Boyd, and are all well at Portisdale?"

He had recovered himself when she ceased speaking, and answered, "I left there more than two years ago, Miss—Miss Villiers, did you not hear?"

"I have heard nothing; you must remember Little Stanville is almost beyond the pale of civilisation. May I ask where you are now located?"

"At St. Mary's, in the Whitechapel district," and then Louise, who had been both watchful and angry throughout the interview, said:

"Mrs. Holland is waiting for you, Mr. Boyd; cannot these very pleasant reminiscences and disclosures stand over until we have all lunched?"

Without a word Virginia turned to Bruce; he wore a grave, almost stern aspect, but his first remark was extremely conventional. "You are old friends, you and Boyd? Do you know Portisdale well?"

"No; I saw very little of the place during my stay there. I did not often go abroad, and Mr. Boyd was my only friend."

"Friend! Forgive me, Miss Villiers, was he ever more than that to you?"

A moment she hesitated, then she said very quietly, "I cannot conceive why you should imagine such a thing. Mr. Boyd is married, and the extremely proud father of three extremely lovely children." His expression of relief was so great that at another time Virginia would probably have laughed, for she had a keen sense of the ludicrous, and the laughter came more readily to her lip than the tear to her eye. But now she was desperate, unnerved, anxious, and at the first opportunity left Bruce, to find refuge in her own room. There she stood erect, her face all changed and marred by terribly conflicting emotions, and her firm mouth grown tremulous. "What will he do?" she said, again and again, to herself, "What will he do? Will he show that mercy of which his cloth are so fond of preaching, or will he hound me down? Am I never to escape the dreadful past? Is there no security for me?"

When the merry party gathered at luncheon she fancied curious glances were levelled at her, and because she feared so much, saw things which really did not exist. She passed a miserable day, and Louise always on the alert to find some flaw in her rival, remarked to Bruce that she was *distract* and most certainly anxious. He paid little attention to her malicious insinuations, but he was terribly perplexed by Virginia's manner; that he loved her he did not any longer seek to hide from himself; but he could not guess in what light she regarded him. He was almost inclined to believe that Bernard Boyd

had been an old lover—but whether he or Virginia had proved inconstant he could not determine. One thing at least was very evident—each had been agitated by that morning's meeting, and he determined so soon as chance allowed to have an explanation with the woman he desired to call wife. He had so much to give her—an honourable name, wealth, position, a title in the future, for he was direct heir to Lord Congresford—a heart which had never known any love save love of her, and all he asked in return was that she should hold him dearest in all the world. Full of these thoughts he wandered to the Rosery; it was a clear moonlight night, and long before he reached the spot where he and she had loitered only that morning, he saw two figures standing under the trailing branches of a china rose. The clear white light fell fully upon the heavy masses of auburn hair, the small oval face lit up by those wonderful violet eyes. There was no need to ask who was Virginia's companion; his dress proclaimed him Bernard Boyd.

"You will not betray me," said the dearest voice in all the world to Bruce. "You were merciful in the past; extend your mercy to me now. I am even more in need of pity than then—when I lived apart from all."

"Miss Villiers, can you doubt you have my sincerest sympathy, as long ago you had my fullest confidence. I wish I could feel sure that your secret was as safe with me as with others."

"You mean Captain Conway. I heard he had resigned. Is it true?"

"Quite; he has come into an enormous fortune, and is figuring as a man of fashion; they were not sorry to lose him at Portisdale."

Virginia sighed. "I am almost grieved to hear of his accession to wealth. Naturally the dangers to me are increased; still I will try to hope that discovery may not ensue; only our chance meeting to-day has shown me how small the world is, and how difficult it is to find a safe refuge."

"But your friends surely have as much faith in you as I, a comparative stranger."

"I doubt if I have any real friends; and certainly there is no one to whom I would confess the truth. If you, who are so mere a stranger can trust me thus, I will have nothing but implicit, unquestioning confidence in others. Thank you for your goodness, and now please leave me; return to the house by yourself, and try to remember that at best we were but casual acquaintances."

"I will obey you," he answered gravely, "and I hope that your future will be so bright as to obscure the past."

He was gone; whatever secret lay between them, it was evident they had never been lovers; Bruce breathed relievedly—and yet what mystery enveloped Virginia? Until it was explained away dare he pray her to become his wife?

### CHAPTER III.

It was a very pretty and minute home which sheltered Virginia; a mere cottage, boasting in all five rooms, for Virginia was the reverse of rich, and it needed very skilful management to make both ends meet, as Miss Villiers was much sought by those in authority. Years ago, none entertained so generously as Villiers-Villiers of The Court; but a series of misfortunes had reduced his exchequer to a very low ebb indeed; it was whispered that Egbert, the only son, was a terrible thorn in his father's side, and had helped largely to bring about his downfall. However that might be, The Court was finally in the market, whilst its owner retired to the cottage now occupied by his daughter, and known from time immemorial as The Midget's house. But he only survived the transplanting for a few months, and dying, bequeathed his little remaining property equally between Egbert and Virginia. But there was one condition attached to the girl's legacy; she was not to inherit it until her twenty-fifth birthday, she could not even raise a penny upon her expectations. A small sum had been set aside for her maintenance, sufficient, and no more, to last throughout the three years

which intervened between Villiers-Villiers' death and her coming into possession of her small annuity.

Egbert, on the contrary, was to receive his first instalment in advance, and to him was left the guardianship of his sister. All the county heard with astonishment that the young man had really not the proverbial shilling to call his own; unknown to his friends he had realized every penny he could upon his expectations, and spent the money so acquired in ways best known to himself. Literally nothing but poverty stared him in the face; but, with the hopefulness of a buoyant nature, he declared his intention of going to town to make a fortune. His talents were of a very versatile order, and he counted much upon his social prestige to help him in the struggle before him. So Midget's House was let to a maiden lady of limited means, and Egbert with his sister and the faithful Tabb went to town.

From time to time letters reached one or another of their friends, but they gave very meagre accounts of their success, mode of life, &c.; they moved constantly too, and generally they forgot (?) to enclose any address, so that they presently grew very misty characters to the worthy folk of Stanville, and everything connected with them was vague and unsatisfactory. Then came a long silence; a rumour got abroad that Egbert Villiers had left England in disgrace; no one could tell how or where it started, but it certainly seemed confirmed when Tabb returned to Stanville alone.

Questioned about her master and mistress, she gave only churlish answers, "It was not for the common people of the town to inquire into Miss Villiers' affairs, she had come down to take charge of the house (now empty) until it pleased her lady to return." Pressed as to the truth of the report concerning Egbert, she laughed derisively, answering, "He had gone away to make his fortune," and nothing more could be gleaned from her.

In silence fifteen months wore by, and Virginia came into her own; all Stanville was electrified when one day she quietly drove up to the Midget's House, evidently prepared to stay.

She was looking ill everybody agreed, and she was shorn of the luxuriant locks which were the envy of half the county belles. Where she had been she would not say, but she accounted for her short, curly tresses by saying she had been down with a serious malady, and not one word escaped her as to her recent residence or mode of life.

She took up the threads of existence where she had left them fall, and had presently regained her old footing; but it was often remarked that she never spoke of her brother, and some from pity, some from delicacy, refrained from questioning her with regard to him. But Louise Fawcett pondered over all that was mysterious concerning the Villiers, and never lost an opportunity of wounding her rival.

She was six years younger than Virginia, handsome, stately, of good birth; but she knew that all her charms were as nothing when pitted against the nameless fascination the other exercised, half-unconsciously, upon all who came under her sway. Then, too, with all the force of an ill-regulated nature, she loved Bruce Sunderland; had he been poor and obscure she would have broken her haughty heart rather than have shown him favour; but he was the best "catch" in the county, and she had vowed to herself to win him—and he would have none of her love.

She writhed under the knowledge; from childhood she had been the petted darling of a doting father, the arrogant mistress of obsequious servants, and she could ill bear opposition or disappointment.

She was shrewd enough, too, to feel there was a mystery in Virginia's life, and to herself she swore to solve and reveal it, to bring her down to the very dust—only she did not quite see how to set about her self-imposed task. Keenly alert, it did not escape her that once, on that last evening of Virginia's stay with Mrs. Holland, Mr. Boyd had addressed her as Miss Penduck, and was immediately covered with confusion. She had been so intent upon observing him for a

moment, she forgot to study Virginia. When she did so the pale high-bred face wore a look of amusement, and the smiling lips said, softly,—

"You are relapsing into the old absent frame of mind when you forget my identity. Who was Miss Penduck?"

"A lady I knew years ago; she bore a marked resemblance to you, Miss Villiers—and it is so long since we met, I may be pardoned for my momentary confusion of personalities."

"It is both awkward and unlucky to have a doppel-ganger," answered Virginia with a slight shrug of the shoulders. "I do not know that I quite like the idea of my double—such embarrassing events might arise from our resemblance each to the other. Was Miss Penduck nice?"

"She was very unfortunate, and very brave," and then Mrs. Hollands, joining them, asked Virginia for a song, so that an end was put to their conversation. But Bruce had heard all, and when, later, he stood on the terrace under the shadow of an old elm, the sound of voices came to him he forgot that he should go away. The first voice was that of Bernard Boyd, and it said in grave remonstrance—

"Miss Villiers, you are too audacious. Why cannot you let well alone! You think to crush suspicion, you will only arouse it; and uncharitable as it may appear, I feel it my duty to warn you especially against Louise Fawcett."

"Thanks, but the warning is really unnecessary; I know she is my enemy, and am armed at all points against her attacks. Perhaps I am incautious, but that is only the true Villiers spirit breaking out; sometimes I feel as though I must shout the truth from the very housetops, and I take a foolhardy pleasure in stepping as near as I safely can to the very brink of ruin. You see, with a sudden wistfulness in her languid notes, "I am so conscious of my own innocence that I expect others to take me at my own valuation—it is foolish but—"

"Very foolish," remarked Mr. Boyd drily; "I would not put my friends to the test were I you; it might be awkward for them and painful to you."

"Perhaps you are right, and yet it seems to me impossible that those who have known me all my life should so misjudge me. My friend, but for you I should long ago have fallen into the very abyss of despair; there, let us talk no more of my troubles, forget they exist, as I often do, for I am a creature of impulse, the most mercurial woman under the sun. Let us walk to the Rectory, and you shall tell me of Mrs. Boyd and the babies, whom one day I shall know."

And yet, despite the curious conversation he had overheard, as soon as Virginia was settled in her own home, Bruce drove out with Mrs. Hollands and Freda to call upon her. Always in his ears rang that sweet voice saying so earnestly, "I am so conscious of my own innocence that I expect others to take me at my own valuation;" and to himself he said "Though all the world were leagued against her my faith would remain intact; she may be injured against, but she remains unsullied; I will win her or wed no other."

They found Virginia in the beautiful little garden busy amongst the flowers, and to the man who loved her she had never looked more lovely than in her simple cotton gown, with the white lace at her throat and wrists. She met them frankly and cordially, conveying them at once to the "keeping-room" as she called it, and it being just on the stroke of one, she rang for luncheon to be served, adding, "It is really my dinner hour. I hope I do not shock you, Freda. You see at home I am very primitive in my habits; but if you will share the mid-day meal I shall be most glad; it is usually such a dismal function. Then if you must leave me early, we can have tea outside at four o'clock, and you shall drive home in the cool of the afternoon."

"It was really too bad of you to leave us," said Mrs. Holland, as she sank into her seat; "we are in the oddest state of confusion—come back."

"Not now, thank you; and please let me beg you to do justice to your impromptu lunch, it is of my own preparing."

It was simple enough, but so daintily served, so daintily concocted, that her guests did ample justice to it, and when Tabb had cleared away the remnants of the feast, Mrs. Holland fell into a

gentle sleep; Freda talked drowsily awhile, then followed her friend's example, so that to all intents and purposes Bruce and Virginia were alone.

"Come outside," he said imperiously, "I have much to say to you."

At this tone of authority she flushed slightly, but she made no remonstrance; stepping into the hall, she took possession of a big mushroom kind of hat and led the way into the garden. It was shady under the trees, and it was secluded. Quietly she turned to him, as quietly said, "You can speak here without fear of eavesdroppers," and then bent her regard upon a small blue butterfly flitting amongst the flowers.

"Virginia," he said, "I am aware that I speak presumptuously, having known you so short a time, and I can only plead my love as my excuse, —will you be my wife?" and just because he felt so much he could say so little.

She did not pretend ignorance of his regard for her; Virginia Villiers was essentially truthful, and she was no longer so young that she mistook love for friendship, so she answered without hesitation, "Forget your wish; it will be better for you. I shall never marry."

"You think there is a very real obstacle to your union with any—pardon me, I am not wholly ignorant of your views upon the subject. I have been sometimes the unwilling listener to your confidences—no," as she flushed crimson, "I have heard nothing that incriminates you—and my belief in your integrity is too deep to be shaken save by yourself. I do not ask to know anything you would hide. I love you, I trust you. I give my honour and my happiness into your hands."

"I will not abuse your trust," she answered unsteadily, "as heaven is above me your honour shall not be smirched, or your happiness spoiled by Virginia Villiers."

"My darling, my darling, even now you threaten to rob me of all joy! If you loved me—"

"But I do not," she said gently, "I have never known what some are pleased to call the grand passion."

"Then I will teach you love's lesson; you who are so proud that you defy the little blind god, shall grow very humble, and, in your new, sweet humility, you shall come to me and cling on, never to loose."

#### CHAPTER IV.

"I do not think that will ever be," she said, gravely. "For my own sake, and for yours, I hope not; nothing but sorrow could result from such a union as you desire. Believe me when I tell you that your suit is utterly hopeless."

"I refuse to accept my dismissal, or to regard myself as defeated; if indeed you should prove always obdurate, then I would have you remember that the spoiling of my life lay to your charge."

"Oh, this is unmanly," she said, with a touch of passion; "and you are not likely to improve your case by petty persecution. Let us be friends, if you will, but nothing more."

"Friends now, loyal lovers later." Virginia, won't you trust me with your story? Whatever it may be—however much appearances are against you—my faith will remain unshaken; and, knowing all, I may be able to help you in your self-vindication."

"I can tell you nothing; I do not even wish to clear myself. Thus much will I confess, I can only purchase my happiness by accusing another, whose ruin it would be, both socially and morally."

"Then come to me as you are, sweetheart; I will ask nothing, so absolute is my faith in you. If through some mistaken idea of duty, you have taken upon you the burden of another's sin, at least let me help you to bear it; I ask no more."

She was infinitely touched by his generosity. There were tears—oh! so unaccustomed—in the lovely eyes, and her voice was not quite steady as she answered,—

"You are as noble as you are strong; but even your love would not endure the test to which it might be subjected. At any moment that which

I have so ardently striven to hide may be discovered, and for the man who called me wife it would mean social ostracism. I have spoken plainly, and have probably succeeded in winning your contempt. It was good to have your esteem and friendship; now that I cannot hope any longer to call them mine, let us go in to the others."

"If you wish it, Virginia; but you should not jump at conclusions. I am just as resolved to win you now as before your voluntary confession."

Not another word passed between them then, except upon ordinary matters, but Virginia found herself thinking very often of Bruce as her solitary days went by. She did not love him yet; as she had often said, "with her love was a plant of slow growth"; she even did not believe it possible she could merge her strong identity into that of any man. Still, she was very pleased to meet him again when she and Tabb arrived at Burkle-on-Sea; he was so pleasant a companion, so intimate with all those authors and poets in whose works she revelled; so clever a musician, such an authority upon art, they had so many things in common it was a pity he would not be content to let things remain as they were. He never referred to that scene in the little garden, but his manner told her that it was ever present in his mind, and at times a most unaccustomed shyness possessed her when she found herself *à-à-à* with him.

Five pleasant days went by, and Virginia, walking alone on the beach, was pounced upon by Freda, who was still Mrs. Holland's guest,—

"Oh, I am glad!" said the girl, "to get you to myself; all the week Mr. Sunderland has monopolised you in the most shameless fashion, and I have such a budget of news for you. You remember a stately Italian—Count Borghetti—who used to haunt Mrs. Holland's last year? Well, he has proposed. She would not give him an immediate answer—you know where foreigners are concerned one must be careful. It would be so mortifying to marry a 'count' only to find out he was a Knight of the Napkin. But Ellen is cautious, and instituted certain enquiries about him, the result being eminently satisfactory; so in a few days the announcement of their impending marriage will be in all the society journals. Now confess that you are a great deal astonished!"

"I am almost petrified with wonder!" laughed Virginia. "Go on, Freda!"

"Well, the next item concerns Louise Fawcett. You know how persistently she angled for Bruce Sunderland!—oh! yes she did; don't perjure yourself to deny it. At last she sees how useless are her efforts, thanks to you—why, Virginia, you are blushing!—and has wisely resolved to take the gifts the gods send—or so her mother believes. She has been three weeks at Cowes, and joins us to-night, bringing her last admirer in her train. I understand he is middle-aged and wealthy—you know how the latter fact would weigh with our mutual friend!"

"Freda, you are growing quite caustic. Is it the result of jealousy?"

The girl laughed light-heartedly, as her eyes met Virginia's, which were full of amusement.

"Jealous of Louise! I am not quite in my dotage; and, for all her beauty, I would not change places with her. I am a plain little wretch, but I am a favourite with most people, and, when I marry, if ever I am so far fortunate, I shall marry for love."

"A very commendable resolve," said a mischievous voice behind, and as the girls turned, flushed and confused, they met the regards of Bruce Sunderland.

"You are too bad!" pouted Freda. "You deserved to overhear our candid opinion of you. It might have taught you caution in approaching folks so stealthily. I wonder how much you really heard?"

"Less than I wished," he answered, laughing. "Who is Miss Fawcett's swain?"

"I quite forget his name, but of course he is a notability. You will have the pleasure of meeting him at the Villa Nova to-night. I wonder how Louise will comport herself? I guess we shall all be overawed by her added dignity and undisguised triumph."

"Your native impudence will carry you through



the ordeal," laughed Bruce, "and I will do my best to support Miss Villiers."

"The offer is well meant," said Virginia, with a smile, "but it is declined with thanks; I believe my strength will be sufficient for my need."

Then other friends joined them, and Louise was forgotten until the evening, at least by two members of the little party. At six Virginia, dressed in her favourite white, with crimson roses at her breast, made her way to the Villa Nova; Freda was already in the drawing-room, looking unusually well, and in the highest of spirits. "Oh Virginia," she said, under her breath, "the latest importation is a martinet; the stiffest bit of humanity it has been my lot to meet; to wrest Dickens' words to my own purpose, Louise went out 'to catch a husband, but caught a Tartar'; won't there be ructions when their wills clash?" She could say no more, as at this moment Louise entered with her hostess. Then the room began to fill, but the last to arrive was a tall, military looking man of some sixty years; he was not ill-favoured, but his evident pride and arrogance rendered him an object for avoidance. As he advanced Mrs. Holland met him: "You must let me make you known to Miss Villiers at once; you have heard so much of her that she must almost seem as an old acquaintance." She was crossing the room with him, when the sudden start he gave made her glance up quickly; with a frown he demanded, "How did that woman gain entrance here?" and his eyes were bent so unmistakably upon Virginia that for a moment Mrs. Holland could not speak. Captain Conway, however, was used to obedience from all, and asked in still more authoritative tones, "Where did you meet Mary Penduck?"

"Oh dear," laughed the hostess relievedly, "this is the second time Miss Villiers has been mistaken for a girl named Penduck. Mr. Boyd fell into the same error; until then we had thought Virginia unique."

"And Boyd was convinced of his mistake?"

"Why, of course, Virginia had lived amongst us all her life."

"With your permission, madam, I will defer the ceremony of introduction."

"Oh, certainly," said Ellen Holland, who hated mysteries of any kind, and who, although not overwise, scented one here, "will you take in Miss Sessions." She was looking at Virginia all the while, and her mind was a good deal troubled by what she saw. Miss Villiers was always pale, but her face had now taken an ashen hue, and the dark eyes were wide with fear. She evidently did not hear one word her companion uttered, and the hands which fluttered about her throat were trembling painfully. She was so *distrait* throughout the meal which followed, so evidently ill at ease under Captain Conway's fixed regards, that a faint sense of curiosity stirred several guests. Bruce himself was in an agony of dread for her. He recalled that night when he had been the unwilling eavesdropper during her closing words to Bernard Boyd. Conway—why that was the name of the man whose accession to wealth she regretted—the enemy who would destroy her peace. More than ever now would she need his love and watchfulness.

The gentlemen did not remain long over their wine, when they entered the dainty drawing-room Virginia was seated by an open window, commanding a view of the sea, which glistened like silver under the moonlit sky. "To her Captain Conway immediately crossed (much to Bruce's annoyance), and stooping down he said a few words in so low a tone that no one else could hear. The result was that Virginia rose at once and stepped into the garden beside him. Bruce watched them until the trees hid them from view, and then remained in an agony of torment for her return. Away from the house Captain Conway turned sharply upon his companion.

"What do you mean by masquerading here as Miss Villiers?" he demanded.

"I am Miss Villiers," she answered with half sullen defiance. "When you met me it suited me best to be known as Mary Penduck."

"You are pleased to be insolent, madam; but I think your time of triumph is at an end."

understand, I have no personal animus against you, but society must be protected. I object to meeting you on an equal footing. I refuse to allow Miss Fawcett so much as to enter a room profaned by your presence, and I owe it to my friends to make public your true character."

She was white to the lips, but she said steadily, "I protest still, that I am innocent, but you are small of faith. Tell me what you intend doing."

"Allowing you two days in which to leave Burke and to break with your present friends; you must see you are not a fit associate for innocent girls and honourable men—if you are amenable to reason I will say nothing of your past—"

"And if not," she demanded, "what course will you pursue?"

"I shall tell the story to such as it most nearly concerns," he answered.

"Thank you; yours is the charity the world exercises to the unfortunate and down-trodden. But I am not a weak woman, and will not promise to obey your command; give me at least until to-morrow to consider my plan of action—by night you shall receive my reply. Now leave me; Miss Fawcett will not be the only one to wonder over your strange conduct. Captain Conway, you are a hard and cruel man—it must be a matter for rejoicing to the luckless ones of Portisale that Providence has seen fit to remove you from the post you did not adorn—go!—remember I am a woman, made desperate by my wrongs—at war with the world—so defenceless, so utterly alone that I might well hope for the pity you will not accord."

"You brought this suffering upon yourself by your vice," he began; but she had gone, and he spoke only to the empty air.

#### CHAPTER V.

BURKE-ON-SEA was in a ferment. Everybody who was anybody knew now that Miss Villiers was not what she appeared. That she had suffered a long term of imprisonment for an offence against the law; and indignation was felt on every side that such a creature had presumed to enter the charmed circle which was now effectually closed against her.

In the morning a note had been conveyed to Captain Conway, which he read with much surprise and anger. It was very brief and uncereceremonious, running thus:

"I, Virginia Villiers, refuse to purchase your forbearance on the terms proposed, because so long as any person connected with my case survives perfect safety cannot be mine."

"I will not fly from place to place like a criminal, rather will I cast myself upon the loyalty of my friends. If they fail me I shall have experienced the worst, and as 'no hope has no fear' shall live secure in the time to come from all wounds, defying all threats."

"Use this as you will; my one desire is to end the long, long period of concealment and misery I have endured."

"May you be happier than she you persecute can ever hope to be. If ever you need mercy may you who know not how to exercise it be more fortunate than the victim of your Pharisaical creed."

In a towering rage Captain Conway had gone to Mrs. Holland. The lady was unfeignedly shocked by his disclosure, none the less so because in her own way she was attached to Virginia. Louise openly triumphed in her rival's downfall, protesting all along that she had distrusted her without knowing why, and was glad she was now unmasked, as it was difficult to protect oneself against such people.

Freda Sessions indignantly refused to credit the story, boldly averring her belief in Virginia's goodness, finally carrying the news (with many tears) to Bruce.

This was the tale Captain Conway told. Virginia Villiers, under the name of Mary Penduck, had been tried and convicted for passing a cheque she well knew to be forged, and had been sentenced to fifteen months' hard labour in Portisale Prison, of which Captain Conway had been governor.

She had all along protested the innocence she could not prove, but would say nothing beyond "I do not deserve my punishment."

Bruce listened in stupefied silence; but when Freda shook his arm, saying,—

"Speak, for Heaven's sake, don't tell me you have gone mad like the rest. Virginia couldn't do it, there is nothing ignoble in her nature," he sprang to his feet, exclaiming, "You are a loyal and good girl, Freda, and from my heart I honour you. Believe evil of her! How could I! I will prove my utter faith in her by making her my wife, without delay, if only she will consent. Let us go to her now."

But Virginia was out when they arrived. She had driven down to the Villa Nova only to be informed that Mrs. Holland was not at home.

She felt choking as she gave the order "To the Downs!" for she had seen her one-time friend peering at her through the curtains.

As she drove along she passed many who but yesterday had delighted to honour her, but none now heeded her. Pride alone sustained her, pride made her walk with Tabb that night on the pier.

She met Louise Fawcett there, and with desperate defiance spoke to her as on ordinary occasions; but Louise, withdrawing her skirts from contact with her, remarked to her companion,—

"You do not recognise her! That is Miss Villiers, alias Mary Penduck, the ex-convict. Her vices are only equalled by her audacity," and passed on.

"Miss," said Tabb, "let me follow her. I'll make her eat her words or I ain't Jane Tabb;" but with a mirthless laugh Virginia said,—

"The enemy is hydra-headed. If you would benefit me you must exterminate all; come, I am tired. Oh, Tabb, where shall I hide! where shall I hide!"

Then her mood suddenly changed. All the way to their lodgings she laughed and talked with such desperate gaiety that the faithful servant eyed her askance, wondering was she going mad with her misery and wrongs.

At the little gate stood a tall, stalwart figure. Virginia paused, seemed about to turn back, when the man, advancing, said,—

"It is I, Miss Villiers. If you are not too tired will you walk with me along the Downs, they are almost deserted now?"

"Or you would not invite me to share your ramble," she answered, in a high hard tone. "Of course you know I am boycotted, cast out of the sacred circle."

"You shall not take that tone with me," he answered, firmly; "thank Heaven I am strong enough to stand alone. Virginia, come," and he drew her little unresisting hand within his arm. They walked in silence until they were far out upon the Downs, then Bruce said, very gently, very tenderly, "My darling, my darling, you must let me care for you now, you must let me fight this bitter battle for you, and only as your husband can I do it effectually, Virginia. When will you marry me?"

All this was so unexpected that her last remnant of strength and pride broke down. She burst suddenly into passionate sobs and tears.

"Don't," she said, "oh, don't speak so kindly to me. Harshness I can bear, but your goodness breaks me down. Your friendship I will have, your love I dare not take; but I thank and bless you from my heart."

"I need no thanks. I could not doubt you if I would. I only want my wife."

"Your wife must come to you with stainless name, loving you perfectly."

"I will wait for the love to come, and your integrity is beyond doubt, Virginia. Sweetheart, how long will you make me wait?"

Her tears flowed afresh. He put an arm about her, drawing her close. Her hat had fallen back, leaving the lovely head uncovered. He pressed his lips to that wealth of shining hair, and waited for her to recover her lost composure.

"Almost you make me love you," she said when she could speak. "No other man would have stood so cruel a test; and just because you deserve so much more than I can give, I will not listen to your entreaties. Oh, you must be mer-

ciful to me, for I am weaker than I thought, and all my heart cries out for the shelter your love would afford."

"Listen, then, to your heart's promptings; they will not lead you astray."

But she held him off with little tremulous hands; never in all her life had she so longed to be loved; if he had been less noble she might even then have taken advantage of his passion; but his very willingness to sacrifice all for her, made it impossible for her to do so.

"You would live to be sorry because of me, and that shall not be. Sit down here upon this knoll, and let me tell you all the story I once vowed should never pass my lips. But at least I owe some explanation to one who has proved himself loyal where so many were false. It is quite true that I have undergone the ignominy of a public trial; that I have worked among the basest of criminals, myself wearing the prison garb, my hands all bleeding from the rough tasks given them to perform. You have heard how from affluence we fell to poverty, and how I went away with Egbert, my brother, to seek his fortune. Naturally we turned our faces towards London; we had very little money, and no friends save Tabb, who went with us. But Egbert was convinced our name would be a sort of sesame to all lucrative offices. He quickly discovered his mistake, and was glad to accept an engagement as comic man at a music hall. But he quarrelled with the proprietor, and was once more without employment; then he tried successively literature, art, agencies,—failing in all. Then we moved to Portisdales, and finally he was glad to accept a clerkship at the handsome salary of fifteen shillings weekly. For awhile he was really steady, but from the first I felt he would never endure the confinement and ungenial work. Poor Egbert! he was always infirm of purpose, wavering and untrustworthy; so that although I was five years his junior I had always to lead and guide him. Presently he began to keep late hours, and laughed all my remonstrances to scorn; I knew he spent far larger sums of money than we could well afford, and warned by past experience I questioned him as to the resources from which he drew them, but he would tell me nothing, only one day he bitterly complained of our lack of means and my inability to touch my little income for at least eighteen months. He grew feverish in manner and appearance, and seemed always anxious to avoid me. Then people began to call demanding payment for this and that luxury he had obtained, and I spoke to him very bitterly. He listened without responding, and, indeed, seemed wholly to forget the matter throughout the succeeding week. On the eighth day he came to me and tossing a cheque upon the table, bade me cash it at the butcher's shop where we dealt. I saw it was for fifteen pounds, and I said 'where did you get this?' 'Oh,' he answered 'the governor and I had a little bet on the Derby favourite and I was the winner,' and apparently thinking this explanation sufficient, left me. I went at once on my errand, rejoiced to think we had a little money in hand to meet the claims against us, and on my way home paid two or three small amounts we owed. That night Egbert did not return home, but as this was not an unusual occurrence, I was not anxious. In the morning a letter was brought to me, and when I saw the familiar handwriting my heart grew sick with a nameless fear. It was from Egbert, and this was what he had written,—every word is imprinted still upon my brain.

"Fly while you have time; the cheque I gave you was forged; I have been a fool and am an arrant coward. I dare not stay to face the consequences of my crime. Before this reaches you I shall be on my way to Australia, but I rely upon you to keep this knowledge secret. When I have found employment I will send for you; in the meantime return to Stanville, no one will associate your name with that of Mary Penduck (I ought to have told you that we were then known as the Penducks), and in any case no harm can befall you. I am a poor creature, but upon my soul, Virginia, I love you, and if you will only stand by me now, I swear this shall be the turning-point of my life; I ask this in the name

of our dead mother. Burn this as soon as it is read."

"In everything I obeyed him, although I did so mechanically; I began to put my few belongings together—that fact went against me, the counsel for the prosecution arguing that flight was evidently intended, and that, were I innocent of the charge brought against me, I should have remained to answer it; for I must tell you that I was arrested as I was about to leave the house. I cannot tell you all I underwent; I only knew I was strong and Egbert weak, that his salvation or ruin remained with me; so I obstinately refused to say a word in self-defence—and he was safe."

"He was a devil," Bruce said in a white heat, "a cowardly devil! Oh my darling, my darling, let my love atone for all the past—"

"Hush! remember this story is known only to you; I have taken the burthen upon me, I must bear it to the bitter end. Would you have me clear my name by fouling his? No, no; and now you see how hopeless it is to go on loving me. Let me slip out of your memory, let me be as one long dead; it is better so, because the world holds nothing good or honourable for me—and you, if you called me wife, must share my exile and my shame!"

## CHAPTER VI.

"OUR home shall be where you will," he began, when she interrupted him, hurriedly,—

"The greatest kindness I can show you is to send you away; and with Heaven's help that is what I am about to do. No, you cannot move me; because my life is spoiled shall yours be ruined? I am almost content now that you know the worst and can pity me still—"

She looked so resolute, so immovable, standing there, that instinctively he felt all entreaties would be not only vain but cruel, and he said,—

"What of this wretch for whose sake you suffer living martyrdom? Did he make no effort in your behalf? Or was he obstinately silent?"

"He did not know of my arrest and subsequent imprisonment, until it was all over. Then he wrote me from Sydney, saying he was doing fairly well, and hoped soon to send for me. I replied that I would willingly join him without further delay, if he would but communicate his wishes on the subject. Since then I have heard nothing; knowing his peculiarities I am afraid his silence means he is in poor circumstances."

"He deserves to suffer; and see here, Virginia, since he is too far removed from all who knew him to feel their contempt, why not at least speak and clear yourself from obloquy?"

She smiled sadly.

"Who would believe me? Would not all say, 'Why did she not speak sooner? Does she hope that Egbert is dead that she lays the onus of her guilt upon him, knowing he cannot give her the lie?'"

He saw the force of her argument, and groaned; for a moment there was silence between them, then he said,—

"What is it you will do then?"

"I shall let Midget's House if possible, and go abroad with Tabb; life in England is now impossible for me."

"You will at least not keep me ignorant of your movements."

"It would be better so; but my heart pleads with me to grant you so small a favour, and so it shall be as you wish."

"If ever you repent your decision, you will write me to that effect."

"I shall not repent; and now tell me of your own plans?"

"I am going abroad; but my destination is Sydney, my intention to unearth Egbert Villiers and to wrest a confession from him which shall clear you—(he shall be left unmolested), even if it costs me half my fortune; but by Heaven for once in his craven life he shall speak truth. You need not look so frightened; I shall not use physical violence; and you shall not have endured so long in vain," the anger died suddenly

out of his voice, as with an infinitely tender gesture he put his arms about her, drawing her near until her white face lay upturned upon his broad chest, and said, "Poor little dove! poor little helpless soul—what can you do alone, with all the world against you?"

"I have been so long alone—that that I—do not feel—my solitude as other women would;" and then, suddenly as the full sense of her desolation dawned upon her, of what her life would be when he had gone from her, she grew weak, and cried out, "Oh, do not leave me long alone; come back with the assurance that I may face the world boldly in my established innocence, and—and—"

"And what, Virginia?"

"Ask of me what you will, and it shall be yours."

"Even to your hand and your heart, beloved?"

"Even to those."

"You have given me the necessary incentive to work; if I succeed I will claim your promise; if I fail I shall never return to trouble you."

The tide was fast coming in; little foam crested waves lapped the shore reaching further inland with every passing moment.

"We must be going," said Bruce, "but first you must kiss me good-bye, heart of my heart."

Without a word of reproof or remonstrance she let him take that first caress which shook her to the soul; until that moment she had not guessed how dear he had grown to her. Neither spoke then until the garden gate was reached, then Virginia said,—

"But for Captain Conway you need never have known this tragedy."

"It shall not be a tragedy; and I am glad that he appeared upon the scene, because now I understand what it is I have to fight. One thing puzzles me; how did Boyd come into possession of the facts?"

"He was the prison chaplain; Captain Conway the governor. The first believed implicitly in my innocence; the latter said my face proclaimed my guilt and always treated me as harshly as he dared."

"The brute! There is consolation in the thought that Louise will make things lively for him when once she is his wife. When do you propose flitting?"

"To-morrow; the rumour has already reached my landlady, and she intimated that my early departure would be most agreeable. I heard her bid the maid lock up all the silver, and to-day I had to content myself with very inferior plated articles. If you look so furious you will nip my confidence in the bud"—she was trying to speak lightly, but she was curiously unmoved; not a vestige of her ordinary strength or courage remained with her, and now, she added, pitifully, "Go, if you really pity me. I am absurdly weak to-night—I must be alone."

So he left her there under the starry sky and returned slowly to his hotel. He had refused the hospitality of all those who had failed Virginia in her hour of need; no hand that dealt her a blow should clasp his in friendship, no voice that scorned her utter words of kindness to him. In the morning as he was starting on his long journey a note was delivered to him. He knew the firm yet delicate writing and his cheek flushed whilst a great hope grew in his heart. But this was all Virginia had written.

"Heaven bless and keep you; guide you in all your ways and deeds; and bring you back to the one who needed this heavy trial to teach her her heart's secret; and who, knowing your generosity, pleads with you to extend it to the poor soul fallen from honour and courage—my prayers and my thoughts go with you always."

She loved him! she had at length confessed so much; then only death should baffle him in his search or his attempt to vindicate her honour. On his way to the station he met Freda; she imperiously commanded him to stop;—

"I won't submit to such cavalier treatment," she said with bright eyes; "because I do not deserve it. I have left the Villa Nova, as you might have known I should, had you troubled to think about me at all, and I am going now to Virginia. If she refuses to see me, I shall sit on the doorstep until charity compels her to



admit me and rescue me from death by starvation and cold!"

He readily grasped the hand she extended. "Miss Sessions, your trust in her is good; you cannot fail to comfort and cheer her."

"Oh, yes! you are pleased to speak amiably now; but confess you nursed all sorts of bitter thoughts against me. You believed I followed where the silly sheep led, and I thank you for your flattering opinion! There, I'll not tease you any more; but you must tell me why you are leaving her when most she needs you?"

"I go to do her service; when I return those who were so ready to doubt her will wish they had been less hasty. Be good to her in my absence—she sorely needs a friend, and she has only honest Tabb."

"And Freda Sessions! I have telegraphed to dad, and he has replied bidding me carry her back to Macivor with me—he always liked Virginia; in fact once he almost meditated giving her to me in the place of a mother. Remember that, when you feel just a little bit too sure of her."

A few seconds later Freda had driven up to the cottage where Virginia had taken up her abode, and was demanding haughtily to be admitted.

The landlady hesitated; she knew Miss Sessions by report, and was fearful of offending her; but she ventured to hint that the young lady did not quite understand what sort of person Miss Villiers was, or that she felt it incumbent to expel her from her apartments. "I am only a poor woman, miss," she added, "but I am respectable, and not for worlds would I harbour a forger or a thief. Why it would just mean ruin to me; and, indeed, I'm afraid when ladies learn what sort of character lodged here—"

"My good woman!" broke in Freda, who was really more courageous than she believed; "my good woman! aren't you afraid you may be prosecuted for libel? There isn't an atom of truth in this report, as my coming proves. Show me to Miss Villiers's apartments, and please remember to be silent."

And, much against her will, the woman obeyed. Then, when the door was fairly closed upon her, Freda, running forward, put her arms about Virginia, crying, as she said,—

"Oh, you poor dear! you poor dear! How shall I make you understand how sorry and shocked I am—how angry with those who have lied away your peace? No, I don't want to hear anything—at least, not now. You shall tell me just what you please, and when you please," and then she sobbed right lustily awhile, and, having thus composed herself, she looked up through her wet lashes, saying cheerfully, "Never fear but that we shall weather the storm, and sail into harbour triumphantly. You are going with me to Macivor—no denial!—and we will start when you please; for I have left that stupid Ellen and her friends. But, first, I had a battle royal with Louise, and I even succeeded in piercing the hide of her military rhinoceros. I quite astonished myself by my sarcasm. I guess very few of the Villa Nova party will wish to meet me again."

"And you have lost your friends for my sake," said Virginia, in a low, moved tone. "I hope you may never regret your goodness."

"Not another word on the subject; my one fear is that you will find Macivor so dull and bleak in the winter weather. I am tolerably used to the place now, and really like it, though when dad first bought it I grumbled dreadfully, declaring that I should be buried alive. The question now is when shall we start?"

"At once, if that is possible!" said Virginia, feverishly. "I cannot long endure a systematic course of persecution; and Mr. Wainwright will let the cottage for me. You are an angel of mercy."

"Is it quite the correct thing for angels to wear yachting suits?" laughed the girl. "Come, let me help you pack."

And for a good hour the three (for Tabb had been called in) were very busy.

Before night they had shaken the dust of Burke off their feet; but Tabb did not leave until she had had an encounter with the landlady,

who certainly came off but second best in the wordy war.

They reached Macivor without adventure, and Virginia found it a big grey stone house, set high amongst the mountains; situated on one of the least inhabited of the Orkneys. At the foot of the declivity were some very primitive cottages, a school, but neither church nor manse; the school doing duty for one and any chance minister supplying the second need.

Tabb looked round her with a shudder, and, seeing the barefooted women and girls who ran out to look after them, exclaimed loudly against their indecency, declaring they were no better than heathens, and she shouldn't be surprised if they were cannibals to boot. But when they entered Macivor house her discontent vanished. A great fire was burning in the hall, fleecy rugs were scattered hither and thither about the marble floor, heavy curtains shut out the draught, a home-like air pervaded the whole place, and the welcome Mr. Sessions gave them amply atoned for any discomforts they might have endured; looking on her mistress's happier face the good soul was content.

## CHAPTER VII.

It was not long before Virginia discovered the reason for Freda's change of opinion concerning her island home; three and sometimes four times a week Roslin Rutherford, a young gentleman hailing from Kirkwall, came over to Macivor, and as he made no effort at concealment she was soon in possession of Freda's secret. Then, too, Mr. Sessions delighted to reduce his daughter to confusion by sly allusions to the canny Scot, whom he regarded with great favour, despite the fact that he was a poor man.

"You see, Virginia," he said in one of his confidential moods, "my girl can afford to marry as she pleases, and Roslin is a worthy, clever young fellow. Whilst we lived so much in England, our expenses were terrible, but here they are nil, and every year I have been able to add to the sum put by for Freda, until she is quite a small heiress. This she does not know; I want to put her affection and Roslin's to the test; he is studying law, and goes to town next spring, when we shall find out of what stuff he is made. What is your opinion of him?"

"That he is 'true grit,'" Freda is very fortunate to have won his affection."

"Thank you; I have great faith in your judgment, and my first desire is for the child's happiness. Once I thought to form other ties—stay—" as she rose hastily in deepest confusion, "stay! I am not going to repeat my offence. You showed me very plainly then I was an old fool; indeed, my dear, I ought to have been heartily ashamed to seek to bind so young a life to mine; but the truth is your beauty took away my senses for a little while. Now I know I could not have made you happy, and I myself should have been miserable, because I should never have felt sure you cared for me. Now I want you to realise the old folly is over, and that you are as a second daughter to me; my home yours until you go to one of Sunderland's providing. Run away now to Roslin and Freda; tell the former he was a young ass to come out in such awful weather, and if he has nothing better to do he would be wise to remain here until a change takes place. His people won't be alarmed; they know what magnet draws him to Macivor." For three days the weather continued most inclement, and Roslin Rutherford was so well content with his quarters that he openly wished the storm which raged might be indefinitely prolonged. But to Virginia (who was not in love with him) the hours went by wearily; on the second evening when the lamps were brought in, Roslin remarked on her air of lassitude, and suggested they should "do something" to occupy and interest her mind. Suddenly Freda clapped her hands, "Oh, I know; we will keep school; the 'dominie' went off last month, and the stipend is so small, the place so dull, we cannot find another. Virginia you shall be principal, I monitor, for I am afraid I have

forgotten half I learned in the schoolroom," and from this half jesting proposal great things sprang. Through all the dreary winter months the girls "kept" school; a mother's sewing class was organised, taking place every wee in the great comfortable kitchen of Macivor House; Freda did not work—she merely amused the mothers with recitations and humorous readings—but she was quite willing to help in the distribution of soup, which took place twice a week under Virginia's able supervision. It was an innocent, happy life, and when a letter came from Bruce apprising Virginia of his safe arrival in Sydney, she had very little left to wish for. It was true the weather was almost invariably bad, that for days they could not leave the house, save to venture to the school; but both were healthy, one was happy and the other not easily disturbed by trifles. Mr. Sessions declared he had never been "so jolly" in the whole of his life, and even Tabb said it "was a useful climate, because the girls could not gad about, so more work was done, which was a blessing."

So the months wore by, but no good news reached Virginia from Australia; Bruce had found no real trace of Egbert, although a man answering to his description had for some time made his home at Sydney; it was rumoured that he had gone on to Melbourne, and thither went Virginia's lover. Of his grand uncle's disapprobation of his love, and the task it entailed he had said nothing; she was blissfully ignorant that by marriage with her he would forfeit all claim to the Congressford estates, inheriting only the empty title; he never intended to enlighten her ignorance until she was safely his wife; because he knew that she was capable of any sacrifice for those she loved. She had suffered a long, surely it was but justice that she should now rejoice.

In March Mr. Sessions took Freda to town for a fortnight; Virginia remained with Tabb and Macivor, saying, when urged by her friends to join in their excursion, "No, I am no longer equal to the fight. I am happier here with those who love and trust me."

Three days passed in absolute quiet; the weather was bitterly cold, but calm until the third night, when a storm rose, and, raging through the night, drove many boats inland. In the morning one of these brought a gentleman ashore. He had been a passenger in a steamer and had unfortunately fallen overboard, sustaining such injuries as made it impossible for him to pursue his journey; he must recoup his strength at Macivor, if indeed any cottage would "take him in." This was the story Tabb brought to Virginia, who instantly went down to the rugged shore. There she saw a greybearded man, weak and inert, but quite conscious, and complaining querulously that the peasants were Goths and Vandals, for not one would promise him house-room and attendance, all being ready with excuses for their seeming harshness and inhospitality.

She knew well the generous character of her host, and without hesitation ordered the fishermen to convey the stranger to Macivor House, whilst she despatched a messenger to Kirkwall for a medical man. Then, walking before the rudely constructed litter she led the way to the House. That night she wrote Mr. Sessions what she had done, adding, in a brief note to Freda, "I have just discovered the invalid is Lord Congressford, consequently Bruce's relative; he does not yet know me as myself, but is quite content to address me as Miss Sessions. I have a great mind not to deceive him, until I have won his confidence and, I hope, his affections; you are aware, Freda, that my besetting sin is pride, and I will enter no family on tolerance; if possible, I mean to teach my patient utter belief in my innocence." To which Freda replied,—

"Go on and prosper; if old Congressford doesn't straightway fall in love with you, he is not mortal. We are not returning until a month has gone by. I hope you won't die of ennui in the meanwhile. You will be glad to hear that all is happily settled for Roslin and me: we are to be married in July."

Lord Congressford's injuries, though painful

were not serious, and in less than a week he was able to go downstairs, even (when the weather permitted) to walk in the barren grounds leaning on Virginia's arm. His interest in her daily increased; as Mrs. Holland once said, she was unique, and he liked studying the different phases of her character. Then she was so womanly withal, and never exhibited impatience at his many caprices; fully believing her to be Miss Sessions, he began to think how good it would be if only Bruce could see and love her, to the forgetfulness of "that Villiers woman;" and often he would talk of his nephew, whilst his gentle nurse listened with averted face and drooped head. It was unspeakable joy to her to hear stories of the man she now loved with all the force of a quiet concentrated nature; and his lordship, delighted to meet with so good a listener, chatted on with the garrulity of old age.

"You must pay me a return visit, Miss Sessions," he said one day. "I have a widowed cousin residing with me, and for my sake she will do her utmost to make your visit happy."

"We must consult Mr. Sessions with regard to the trip," said Virginia, smiling, "and I think I really should enlighten you now upon a certain subject. I am not Miss Sessions, only a poor friend of the family."

"But a lady by birth," he interrupted quickly, "I am not easily deceived; my dear, how shall I address you in future?"

"As Virginia; when Mr. Sessions returns he shall tell you my story, and then if you still wish to have me at Congressford Moat, I will go with you. Now, if you please, we will say no more of me." See, the sun has quite gone from the hillside, it is getting chilly, and, as your nurse, I must protest against loitering here."

"What a martinet you are, Virginia; and how readily we obey beauty's commands (with an old fashioned bow to her). My dear, I am wondering in what manner I can recompense you for all your care. Is there nothing you desire for yourself?"

"I would like your perfect trust and affectionate regard."

"You have both, my child; but is there nothing more you will ask?"

"Nothing; I have more than enough for my actual needs; I would have neither gift nor guerdon from you; for then it would seem I had sold not given my services to you" and not another word would she speak of herself that day, or in any that followed, so that my lord's curiosity was piqued. Then Mr. Sessions and Freda returned, the former had been deputed to tell the whole story, but as he vowed he hated anything approaching a scene or an explanation and was sure to blunder, Freda undertook the duty he could not, or would not, perform, and doubtless did her work more satisfactorily than her worthy parent could.

After being closetted with his lordship for a long while, she went dancing into her friend's presence, her face flushed and her eyes aglow with happy excitement.

"It is alright," she cried gaily, "although at the outset the old man regarded me very much as a Sapphira; he is simply delighted to find you are Mr. Sunderland's choice; he hates himself for every unkind thought he had of 'that woman Bruce loves,' and takes back every bitter word he said. Why, Virginia, your luck has turned at last; you have the most noble of men (except Roslin) for your lover. He had given up a great fortune for you, mademoiselle, and with an eccentric, generous, dear old fellow as father or uncle—which you will—we may snap our fingers with impunity at Louise and her court." And here the excitable girl broke into song, her clear voice sending the familiar words "Britons never, never, shall be slaves," echoing through the long corridors and lofty rooms. Then as suddenly she paused: "You must go to Lord Congressford now; did I not tell you he wanted you? Oh! what a feather-headed creature I am. Make haste, Virginia, he is impatient and has a twinge of the gout."

As she entered the room set apart for the invalid's use, he rose from his chair, and taking her hands in his, said "My dear, forgive, if you can, an old man's folly and prejudice, and give me your promise to brighten his home until you go to that of his beloved nephew."

Virginia held back a little, "I would like to go with you," she said gently, "but you must understand that I do so conditionally. If Bruce fails to establish my innocence, if Egbert refuses to clear me, I will not sully your name and his, but live and die Virginia Villiers."

"Bruce will reason with you upon that subject; and my dear, I am a lonely old man, I want you; your very residence beneath my roof will do much to turn the tide of public opinion in your favour, and I think you owe it to your lover to work always for this result."

"You are right, I will go with you, but if friends forsake your house because of me, you must not be angry that I leave."

## CHAPTER VIII.

BRUCE was walking a trifle dejectedly down a long and narrow street in Melbourne. To tell the truth he was growing rather hopeless of finding Egbert Villiers. He never discovered a clue but to lose it, always the object of his search evaded him, and hope so often and so long deferred made sick the heart within him.

True, a letter from Virginia acquainted him with his uncle's changed views and her happier circumstances; but it ended with these words,—

"Do not for my sake remain a stranger to your country. The task you voluntarily entered upon is too hopeless. Leave it unaccomplished and forget me; because, not for my sake must you waste the best years of your life, and not to win joy for myself will I come to you a pariah and convicted thief."

No; he would not give in yet, when the sweetest woman in all the world was waiting him in the dear old country, hoping and praying that Heaven would send him success, if only that she might stand vindicated before him.

It was growing dark, and he had wandered into an obscure somewhat low locality; but he was by nature fearless and not suspicious of evil, so that it was with a start he realised somebody was trying to rifle his pockets.

With the words, "You thief!" he veered round, striking out so vigorously that the would-be pickpocket fell to the ground like a log, with this exception, that where he fell he lay whining and groaning. Bruce touched him with a contemptuous foot.

"Get up you rascal, you are not hurt. Let me look at you."

A groan was the only response.

A group of idlers and loafers soon gathered, and but for the timely arrival of a couple of policemen things might have taken an especially nasty turn for Bruce; but at the advent of the men in blue the crowd dispersed more quickly than it had gathered.

One officer, bending over the prostrate figure, turned his lamp full upon the face, then with a slight laugh, said,—

"Get up, we know your tricks too well. Do you give him in charge, sir?"

"Oh, no, let the beggar go, I don't think he has robbed me of anything. He is a clumsy thief at best. Here, you fellow, get up, what is your name?"

The man squirming before him made no answer, unless a whine could be construed into one; but the policeman said,—

"They call him 'Awkward Jack,' round here, sir. Now, then, get up. What's the use of shamming ill? You've tried that game too often."

Slowly the wretched creature rose. Something in his face seemed familiar to Bruce, as the broad level light fell across it, but what he could not tell.

The brow was low but wide, the hair falling about it in tangled masses (a deep red), the eyes grey, large, too wide apart for perfect beauty or strength of character. The mouth and chin were singularly weak, and above and beyond all, "Awkward Jack" looked hungry and ill. Bruce's momentary anger against him died out.

"Here," he said, tendering him a shilling, "get something to eat, and when next you start pilfering select a less robust victim than myself."

A few words spoken in a musical and not unrefined voice thanked him for his clemency. The officers, with glances of profound contempt, shrugged their shoulders and returned to their respective beats, whilst Bruce, transferring his belongings to his breast-pocket, went serenely on his way.

He had not gone very far, however, when he heard shambling steps behind him, and a voice which panted,—

"Stop, for Heaven's sake—how fast you travel!" and as he halted, "Awkward Jack" came up to him.

"What do you want?" he demanded, austere, "is not the coin I gave you good?" and he glanced critically over the ill-dressed, unkempt figure, puzzling himself to remember when and where he had met the man.

"It is good, oh yes, and I thank you for your generosity, which I most certainly did not deserve. You are, I believe, a stranger here, you talk like a Cambridge man. In my fortunate days I, too, was nursed by Alma Mater; but in an evil hour I left England—"

"Look here," said Bruce, emphatically, "it's of no use trying that dodge with me. You are only a poor hypocrite at best, and I have met dozens of you of your kind before. I have given you all I intend to give, not even for the sake of the 'Varsity days' which, of course we shared (though I neither remember you nor your name), will I assist you further."

The man's head drooped until his chin rested upon his bosom.

"I cannot wonder that you doubt my word. Is there any remnant of the gentleman left in me? And yet I'll swear by birth I am one, and I only ventured to follow you in the hope that as an Englishman you would help an Englishman who has forfeited all claim to compassion or assistance."

"You are a very cool hand. What the deuce could you do? And how do you suppose I could place any confidence in you after our very unorthodox introduction. Once a thief always a thief."

"No, no, give me a chance. I've waited long enough for it. I don't deserve it, perhaps. I do not ask it only for myself—"

"They never do," remarked Bruce, in an aside and smiled sceptically; but even as he smiled the suppliant put up one hand as though to wipe away a tear. It was small and white, wasted and trembling, somehow the sight of it moved Bruce, and he said, quickly, "I will give you a good square meal, and then I will hear your story and see what I can do for you. But I warn you that if you deceive me in the slightest particular I will have you arrested as an impostor. Come along, this seems a fairly good restaurant. Why are you hanging fire?"

"Because if I entered I should at once be driven out; they prize folks here by their clothes; but there's a place in the by-street down there where no questions are asked—"

"Lead on, and for your own sake be honest in your dealings with me."

They left the main street and quickly came to a small but very cleanly looking eating house, where, on the payment of an additional shilling, they were accommodated with a privateroom containing two small tables covered with coarse but white cloths, half a dozen chairs, and a horse-hair couch. Here, for the sum of eight-pence each, they were regaled with hot beef and potatoes, the little maid in attendance bringing in a jug of foaming ale for another fourpence.

Bruce did not eat, but sat back in his chair regarding his companion with very critical eyes, and when "Awkward Jack" had made havoc of the viands before him, said abruptly—

"Here, I say, I seem to know your face; what is your name?"

A moment's hesitation, then the other answered "John Jones."

"Rot! If you must have an alias choose one less worn; look here, my man, if I am going to help you, I am also going to have the whole truth."

The grey eyes, beautiful as to form and colour, so pitiful in their abjectness and wavering regard, met his a moment, then their owner said—



"You have been good to me and I will not deceive you; I should not have ventured to ask your aid but that I felt I must see home before I die—yes, you may laugh if you will—but I am a doomed man. Look at this!" and he bared a mere skeleton of an arm to Bruce's view. "I've been going a long while. First it was the drink, then the weeks of semi-starvation, and influenza has finished the work. I am a consumptive—oh, I am not mistaken—but I've strength enough to work yet; if you are going back take me with you in the humblest, meanest capacity; I will serve you well and faithfully, so that you let me breathe English air before I die. Out there I have a sister; I loved and love her still, although nothing that I did points to that conclusion—if I could crawl to her feet and pray her pardon—"

"Stop!" Bruce said in a very changed voice, "I must have your name."

"Egbert Villiers, one of the Stortonsire Villiers," answered the other with pitiable pride. "I came out in twenty-three—"

"And Virginia Mary Villiers, alias Penduck, is your sister?"

"Yes."

"You cowardly hound!" broke out the other; "you shame to your race and mankind! For years your sister has endured the ignominy which should be yours; you made her your innocent accomplice in your fraud, you left her to bear the punishment of your crime. You so completely ignored her sacrifice and suffering that you made no attempt to assist her or bring her out here, where her sad story was unknown, and then you dare ask help and pity for yourself."

"I was always a weak wretch," Egbert whined, "and nothing prospered with me out here. Then I knew that Virginia's wants were amply provided for, and when she saw the turn affairs had taken, knowing I was safely away, she should have spoken. I can't see I am quite so much to blame as you appear to think—Virginia is a good girl, a very good girl, but she was always a trifle queer."

"What a reward to receive after all her patient suffering—her heroic silence! Almost Bruce felt he must strangle the weak, self-compassionate wretch, and his voice was hard as he said,—

"Drop reminiscences; nothing in the past reflects any credit upon you, and I cannot yet decide whether to make your existence known to Miss Villiers or not. If I take you back to England the chances are that you will not only disgrace yourself afresh but her, and she has already endured too much for your sake."

"I am past all mischief now, I shall but breathe my native air and die—oh, to see home again!"

The yearning in the broken tones was almost terrible to hear; the grey eyes filled with tears until they brimmed over; the unkempt head drooped lower and lower and lower, until with a burst of sobs, the wan face fell upon the outstretched arms—

"I don't deserve it, but oh, may Heaven have mercy upon me now! I am all that you have called me in your righteous indignation, but once she loved me; I would die to-night only to hear her say 'with all my heart I forgive you, brother.'"

Bruce paced to and fro impatiently; in a scornful way he was sorry for this poor wretch. But he hated weakness and vice of any kind, and he was sore to think that so much of Virginia's life had been sacrificed at such a worthless shrine; he waited until Egbert's sobs ceased, then he said,

"For your sister's sake, and because I hope one day to call her wife, I will take you home, provided of course, you can prove your identity."

"That is easily done," and drawing a leather case from the recesses of his tattered garments he produced the last letter she had ever written him. It left no room for doubt. As Bruce thrust it back to him he said—

"I have been bad all through, but I never meant to hurt the little sister; I'll swear I always loved her, but I never could meet trouble or pain—and she was so brave. I think if I had not had such a heavy weight upon my conscience I might have prospered, but I thought of her every day, until my spirit failed me: I lost my berth I took to gambling and sank lower and

lower, then when starvation stared me in the face I fell in with thieves, but I could not learn their dexterity, and because of my many mishaps they called me 'Awkward Jack.' If I should die before we land, keep this part of my story a secret from Virginia—I should be glad to think she did not quite realize my utter degradation."

"She must be spared all further pain," Bruce said loftily, "and you must agree to my conditions, which are these: You must remain here until we sail, I making myself chargeable for any expenses you incur. To-morrow you will be supplied with the necessary outfit. You will also, in the presence of a lawyer and two independent witnesses, sign a confession of your guilt, to be published or not, as I see fit, for the establishment of your sister's innocence; and to prove that I believe there is some remnant of the gentleman in you still, I trust you not to delay the ends of justice by flight."

In a burst of passionate gratitude Egbert Villiers caught and kissed his hands.

"You shall not repent your charity and generosity," he said. "I will be true to my better self, and Virginia shall be vindicated."

The good ship *Argo* made splendid progress. The Captain said this would be the quickest passage she had made, and all on board were eagerly looking forward to a speedy arrival in England.

Yet there was an utter absence of outward excitement. An air of deep quiet seemed to pervade the vessel. Even the cabin-boy forgot to whistle about his labours; and whenever Bruce appeared on deck he was met by sympathetic questioners, for it was well known his fellow-passenger was dying.

They were scarcely more than a week's journey from home when the call came. It was a calm and beautiful evening. The dying man had long been silent; but now, as he lifted his failing eyes to the face now grown so kind, he breathed out,—

"I am—going—fast. Tell Virginia—all I would say—my confession—you will publish that—it is my last wish. Lift me up—my breath is failing me fast. After all"—with a faintly regretful smile—"I shall not lie—in English soil—but nothing matters—now."

He lay quiet for awhile, then suddenly his wan face took upon itself a beauty and majesty it had never worn in life.

"Virginia," he whispered; and as he fell forward in Bruce's arms, he realized he was dead.

They buried him at sea, and although he had been most erring, most pitifully weak and selfish, one woman mourned him truly; and in those happier days which followed, often reproached herself that she had not felt greater tenderness for him.

"Virginia, you will not deny me now! You shall tell me with your own lips all that you feel, all that I am to you, my dearest heart."

"I could not if I would," she answered back. "All I can say is that you are the very breath of my life. Bruce! Bruce! I never can thank Heaven enough that it has given me you."

There was a double wedding at St. George's, the brides being Virginia and Freda; and the latter was too generous to grudge her friend the admiration accorded her beauty. She was far too happy as Roslin's chosen to have room in her heart for envy; and she was full of pity when, as she entered the carriage with her husband, she caught a fleeting glimpse of Louise.

The beautiful, haughty brunette was not a guest; she and Freda had long ceased to be more than acquaintances, but the young bride said, with tears in her eyes,—

"Oh, Roslin, how much happier are we! It would kill me to lose you now—and, you know, Louise and her husband parted after just five months of married life."

"And the fault was not all Conway's, I'll swear."

"Still, I pity her. Oh, poor Louise! she has missed life's best gift—love."

THE END.]

## FORTUNE'S MISTAKE.

—:—:—  
CHAPTER XIII.

It had come.

The interview Fortune Langley had dreaded through everyone of the last twenty-four hours was upon her. She and her brother stood face to face; for the first time since Dene's accession to rank and wealth the brother and sister were alone together.

If only they had not been so much to each other the agony of that moment might have been less; but, ever since she could remember, Fortune had been Dene's friend and confidante. It was only since her engagement to Paul Hardy, and in special during the last few months of trouble in London, that they had seemed at all to drift apart. And now she stood so close to Dene she could have put out her hand and touched him, while between them rose up before her the dead face of Eric, Lord Carlyon, parting them as far asunder as the poles.

It was Dene who spoke first. His voice sounded weak and unsteady, his eyes did not meet his sister's as he said,—

"I hope you are better. Really, Fortune," gathering confidence as he went on, "I think you take this too much to heart. After all, Eric was only our distant cousin, and his fate was an accident which no one could foresee. You must cheer up, dear; after all, the calamity has a bright side to it. Our days of poverty are over. I have, they tell me, over ten thousand a year, and you may be sure your comfort and happiness will be my first thought. I hope you will stay here as mistress of the Court. I trust in time you will learn to see that Paul Hardy is utterly beneath you in your new position, and at any rate—"

But she interrupted him. Looking full at him with her beautiful eyes, into which a hardness had crept never seen there in the old days of poverty, she said, coldly,—

"You may leave Mr. Hardy's name out of the conversation, Dene. I did not want to see you to-night. I don't feel up to it; but since you are here, I may as well tell you my plans. I return to Guilford-street on Wednesday morning, and I shall go on working for my own living just as I did before,"—she hesitated—"before last Thursday made you Earl of Carlyon."

Dene's handsome face clouded over, he was unmistakably angry.

"Do you want to insult me, Fortune?"

"No. I only want you to understand that we have come to a point in life where our ways part. There can be nothing in common between a wealthy nobleman and a poor copyist. I don't want to be at enmity with you, Dene, only I can't live your life, and it is easier to make the plunge now than later on."

Lord Carlyon walked the length of the room twice with angry, impatient strides, then he stopped in front of his sister, and said, huskily,—

"Fortune, you must have some reason for this madness. Tell me what it is!"

"Reasons," she repeated wearily, "yes, I have several; but one will suffice. I am very proud, and I cannot owe my support to you. I was not meant for a fashionable lady. The life here would pall on me, and, at best it would only be a temporary arrangement. You are sure to marry, and then your wife would be mistress here."

Dene was partly satisfied. In his heart he did not want Fortune's company; but he was jealously anxious that no one should fancy they were on bad terms.

"You will come to your senses in time," he said, slowly, "and meanwhile, of course, I shall make you a handsome allowance."

"I shall not touch a penny of it, Dene. I should feel that it would scorch my fingers."

But he was gone. She could not tell how he took her last words. She was only conscious that he flung out of the room with something like an oath.

Fortune's resolutions reached Mr. and Mrs. Dover and Lady D. ruley. The kind old lady, though grieving bitterly for Eric's loss, spoke

to Fortune very gravely of her duty to her brother.

"It is a dangerous change for any man from poverty to great wealth," she said, slowly. "Surely, you will not leave Dene alone among the quicksands of his own temptations."

"I cannot stay," then fearing to wound her kind, old friend by the abrupt answer, she added, gently, "if I can foresee anything of the future, Lady Darnley, Miss Belden will yet be Countess of Carlyon, and—I do not like or trust her. As things are I can earn my own bread. If I stayed here a few months it might be hard to take up the fight for a living again, and one home could not shelter Iris and myself."

"It would be indecent for Dene to think of Iris," said the old lady; "why she is almost Eric's widow."

"Were she his widow really, there would be no barrier between her and Dene," said Fortune, wearily. "Dear Lady Darnley, please don't make things more difficult for me. I have thought over everything before I decided."

Mr. Dover himself came up to Fortune's sitting room the night of Eric's funeral.

"I hear you are going to London to-morrow," he said kindly. "I don't know what your plans are; but if you take up the old life, remember I shall have plenty of work for you."

"Thank you! Mr. Dover, please don't think me mad—I'm afraid your wife does—but I could not live at Carlyon Court, it would kill me."

The lawyer's hand rested with almost fatherly tenderness on her shoulder,—

"My dear," he said gently, "my advice to you would be 'don't stay here.' The shock of your cousin's sudden death has evidently upset your nerves. The new Earl is likely to be very much away, to be shut up alone in this huge house with only servants would be a terrible experience for anyone in low spirits, and," his kind old face brightened, "you are not your brother's keeper. You have your own future to think of; you can't sacrifice yourself to him always. If—as I have been told—there is someone working hard to make a home for you, you will be happier far living in comparative poverty with him than in lonely luxury at Carlyon."

The girl's face softened strangely,—

"How well you understand, Mr. Dover. I'm glad someone doesn't blame me for deserting Dene. Indeed, now that he has money, he does not want me. He is sure to marry soon."

"Meaning Iris Belden?"

"I think so."

Mr. Dover hesitated,—

"The property is free and unencumbered. In fact the terms of the entail are so strict that no Lord Carlyon has ever been able to leave entanglements for his successor. Your brother ought to have a brilliant career."

"I think Dene will make a better man prosperous than poor."

"I hope so."

"But you are anxious about him?"

"My dear, an old lawyer ought to be above such superstition, but there is an old legend in the family that whenever Carlyon passes to a different branch of the Langleys the first earl of the new line has much trouble. It is foolish to put faith in an old superstition, but I can't forget that in the few instances I remember of this happening the greatest misfortunes followed. General Langley, Eric's grandfather, lost his life six months after he came into the title by a terrible accident. The earl he succeeded was drowned within a week of assuming the title."

"I don't think I am superstitious," said Fortune, "and yet I feel as if something terrible would happen to me if I remained another week at Carlyon Court."

Wednesday was a day of leave-takings; the Beldens, the Dovers, Lady Darnley and Fortune were all quitting the Court. Miss Langley was thankful to accept Aunt Mary's invitation to travel with her; it prevented any talk of Dene going to the station to see her off, and, as Lady Darnley's maid was in close attendance on her mistress, there would be no opportunity for any attempt at private conversation.

Fortune leant back in the corner of the railway

carriage. It was just a month since she had journeyed down to Hetherton with Dene, full of hope and joyous expectations, and now hope seemed to have dried up in her heart—her whole future was a blank.

They reached Liverpool Street station early in the afternoon, and Fortune drove alone in a cab to Guilford Street. Of course the news of the Langleys' change of fortune had reached Mrs. Cox. She opened the door herself, full of curtsies and enquiries for 'my lord!' She marshalled Fortune upstairs to the old familiar rooms, and opened the sitting-room door with an odd mixture of old kindness and new respect. Only when she enquired, "Will you please to have tea now, Miss—I mean my lady!"—the girl roused herself. Things must be explained once and for always, unless she wanted Mrs. Cox to go on making a series of similar mistakes,—

"I should like tea soon, please; and, Mrs. Cox, I am Miss Langley still. I shall go on living in your second floor for a long time I hope, but I shall do my copying just the same. Nothing will be changed, except that I shall be alone; for my brother has come into a great deal of money, and will live in the country."

"And give you nothing?" cried Mrs. Cox, forgetting her respect in her just indignation. "Then I call it shameful, Miss Langley."

"I am content," said Fortune, with a wan smile, "only, Mrs. Cox, please let the subject never be mentioned again; I have come back to my old life and its old duties, I want things to go on just as they used to do."

But, alas! they could not. Fortune took off her things and sat down to tea. The fire burnt brightly, the room was certainly no uglier or dingier than it had been six weeks before, but the heart had gone out of everything. The lonely girl looked round the room, and at every point was reminded of all she longed to forget. A carved wooden rack with a large display of Dene's pipes, almost up-set her. Paul's likeness in a cheap plush frame on the mantelpiece brought the tears into her eyes, and the old black cat who had crept into the room unnoticed, and now sprang on to Fortune's lap, welcoming her with a wealth of purring which spoke well for his affections and his memory, seemed the last straw. With one hand she crossed the old cat, with the other she wiped away the tears which rained down her cheeks.

Those tears saved Fortune something, not her life or her reason, neither of those had been in danger; but they saved her from the danger of growing into a hardened, disappointed woman. Her life had gone "all wrong," her future was desolate, with her own hand she had had to push happiness from her, and a crust of strong despair had been creeping over her heart. Those tears washed it away for ever; after all she had soon thing to be glad of, she could still be proud of Paul Hardy's love though she could never be his wife, the thought that he had chosen her from all the world was like music in her heart.

"Ah Moses, Moses," she said, stroking the shabby-looking old cat, "it is just as though I had died and — come back again to find everything changed, and all I cared for gone. But life has to be lived, pussy, and we must make the best of it."

Moses purled assent, truth to say, he was not a cheerful quadruped, and the very last cat likely to be made a pet of; he belonged to Mrs. Cox, having been introduced into her establishment from a cats' refuge with a view to killing mice. He fulfilled his destiny, but something—perhaps his vicissitudes before he joined the refuge—had completely broken his spirit; thin, gaunt, and depressed looking he had been when he came to Guilford Street—thin, gaunt, and depressed looking he would probably remain till the end of his career. "A hideous monster," Mrs. Cox called him, and perhaps truly, but Moses had two great virtues, he knew his friends, and his gratitude never failed.

"Fortune!"

Someone had opened the door noiselessly and come in; Chrissie Seymour stood watching her friend with an expression of affectionate anxiety: only the exigencies of a dancing-class had prevented her being at home to meet

Fortune on her arrival, for she guessed how lonely the girl would feel; but she was hardly prepared for the desolation written on the calm, white brow.

"Oh Fortune, Fortune," she cried with an emotion no one would have expected from the firm, self-possessed little dancing mistress, "what is the matter, dear? you look as if you had been ill for weeks, the shock of the Earl's death can't have changed you so; besides you hardly knew him; dear, only tell me what is the matter and let me help you."

"There is nothing the matter."

"Fortune, if I'm in your way tell me to go," returned the other girl authoritatively, "but don't tell me falsehoods; do you think I haven't eyes, do you imagine I can't see how terribly you are altered."

Fortune put out one feverish hand and clasped her friend's.

"Don't go, Chrissie, stay with me to-night, I feel so lonely; to-morrow I shall be better, and by the time I am at work again I shall be quite used to solitude."

Chrissie Seymour said nothing, but she took prompt action, she lowered the blinds, drew the curtains, rang for lights, and for "the girl" to remove the tea-tray; then when she had transformed the dingy room into quite a cheerful scene, she sat down on a low chair close to Fortune, and repeated her question—

"What is it?"

Fortune shivered from head to foot.

"I can't tell you," she said slowly. "Chrissie, you mustn't ask me any questions. Dene is Lord Carlyon, with ten thousand a year. It's not his fault that I have come back here to go on with my copying; he wanted me to live at the Court, but I felt the place would kill me, and—that's all I can tell you."

Chrissie looked at her tenderly.

"I won't ask your reasons," she said gently. "I was angry when you declared 'there was nothing the matter,' because I knew it wasn't true; but you have a right to your own secrets." "Chrissie," and there was just a faint anxiety in the other girl's voice, "you won't give me up!"

"I would as soon give up myself," declared Miss Seymour. "I'm only thinking how to tell you something that happened yesterday. I have a message for you, and now I've seen how ill you look, I can't bear to tell you suddenly lest it should startle you."

"I would rather know."

"Mr. Hardy was here yesterday."

"Yesterday! I told him I should not come home till to-day."

"I know. Lord Fane had given him leave of absence for three nights. He said he had business with his publishers, but I believe the truth was he wanted to see you."

"And you saw him—?"

"I saw him. Fortune, I can't beat about the bush—he told me you had broken off your engagement, and that he was sure it was your brother's doing, for you yourself were too true to be changed by riches. I felt so sorry for him I could have cried. I promised at last to see you and tell you he would be here to-night at eight o'clock."

"I cannot see him, Chrissie; I dare not."

"You must," said Miss Seymour firmly.

"When a man loves a woman as Paul Hardy loves you, he won't be put off by letters or messages. He feels it is his right to hear the truth from the woman's own lips. Somehow, Fortune, he looked so miserable, poor fellow, I felt quite angry with you; but since I have seen you, and see how changed you are, I can't be angry any more. I seem to feel that some awful mystery is at the bottom of it, and that really you are as true and loyal as when you parted from Mr. Hardy last July—only something I can't understand has risen up to divide you."

"I love Paul better than ought else," answered Fortune, "perhaps more than in the old times, certainly not less; but I can never be his wife, never while I live."

"Is it Dene?" demanded Miss Seymour, whose opinion of the new Lord Carlyon was but a poor one; "has his Highness discovered that



now he's an Earl he can't have his sister marry a commoner! Surely, Fortune, you'd not give in to such a scruple! You have sacrificed quite enough to your brother."

"My brother is not my adviser; he knows nothing of the letter I sent to Mr. Hardy. Dene objects to my returning here most strongly; but I felt the time had come for me to take my own course."

Then came the sound of a well-known knock, which sent the colour rushing into Fortune's pale cheeks, and made Miss Seymour start up from her chair and make for the door.

"Be kind to him, dear," she whispered to her friend, "for love such as his is a priceless gift."

She was gone.

Fortune did not dare turn her eyes towards the door. She felt rather than saw that Paul had entered and stood regarding her with a grave, anxious face.

"What does your letter mean?" he asked bitterly, going straight to the point without an attempt at ordinary greeting. "Have you really ceased to care for me? or does your newly-found wealth raise a barrier between us?"

She was silent. She could not tell him as she had just told Christie—she should love him till life ended—or she would expose herself to a hundred questions. She just sat there in painful silence, longing for the agony of that meeting to be over, and yet counting the moments precious that he remained there, because she knew full well how, in the dark aftertime, she would long for the sound of his voice, the sight of his face.

Paul Hardy grew impatient.

"I deserve some answer," he said hotly. "I have given you all I had to give: love, honour, trust, and I have a right to demand why you have changed to me. I left you my promised wife little more than two months ago, your letters since have given no sign of anger or estrangement, until two days ago I received a cold, cruel dismissal with no reason for the step. You tell me to 'forget'; I am not a child but a man, and I have never been good at forgetting."

She raised her face, ah, how wan and troubled it looked in the lamplight!

"You cannot reproach me too bitterly," she said slowly; "I have brought a curse into your life, and I can only say, as I said in my letter—forgive me, if you can."

"I can't," he said hotly, passionately; "some day, perhaps, when years have weakened my memory, and my sense of wrong, I may think less bitterly of you. Now, I tell you the truth, you are a heartless, mercenary creature. You have taken my heart for your plaything, and now that wealth has come to you unexpectedly, you cast me aside like a faded glove."

Once, during this storm of reproaches, she raised her voice to interrupt him, but the words died on her lips; after all since *they must part*, since for Paul's own sake her life must never be linked to his, it was better he should think her bad, designing and heartless, he would 'get over it better' if he thought this, than if he realized there was some mystery in her conduct and that she suffered too.

"Have you nothing to say?" he demanded abruptly.

"Nothing."

"I can't make it out," he repeated in a puzzled voice, more to himself than to her; "you never seemed to care for wealth and rank; I would have staked my soul, Fortune, aye and all my hopes of Heaven on your purity and truth, I could have sworn that you loved me."

"I can never marry you," said the girl resolutely, "for all time you and I can never be aught to each other. I wish you had not come to-night, if only you had accepted my letter as final you would have spared us both pain."

"Pain," repeated Hardy harshly, "I wonder what you know of pain, or, if you realize at all what you have done to me. For months and years my every hope has been bound up in you. I have never had a thought of the future that has not been of you, you have wrecked my life, what do I care for fame without you? My book is printed, they tell me it will be a success, the publishers offered sums I never dreamed of—I

shall go home and put it on the fire, what do I want with fame when my heart is broken!"

Suddenly he crossed over to her side and pressed one burning kiss upon her lips. "I cannot curse you," he muttered harshly, "though Heaven knows you deserve it, you poor, fair, false thing! You will learn, too late, truth and honour are more help to happiness than wealth and rank. Farewell! may no one ever treat you as you have treated me."

#### CHAPTER XIV.

DENE, LORD CARLYON, found time hang very heavily on his hands after his guests had left the Court. To begin with, he was a man who hated solitude, and though he had grumbled not a little when compelled to live in London, the country palled on him. Perhaps he felt that it would be a pleasant sensation to return to London with full pockets after his experience there with empty ones. Also, no doubt, he was quite aware the big city would be a more delightful residence to a wealthy Earl than to a clerk out of employment, and had it rested with his own inclination he would have started directly after the funeral.

But there was a great deal of business that had to be seen to. Mr. Armstrong, the estate agent, made several demands on the Earl's time. Mr. Dover had announced his intention of returning the following week with various papers demanding Lord Carlyon's signature; and last but not least, there seemed a general impression abroad that Dene could not possibly care for gaiety or society so soon after his cousin's funeral; so the new Earl was kept at Carlyon Court by all these considerations, and very dull he found it.

Like Iris Belden, he had no genuine love for a country life, and the large house was dreary for one solitary person; the old servants waited on them assiduously; the wine cellar and the library were replete with choice specimens of their respective stock; but Dene had never been a great reader, and though he liked good living he was not a heavy drinker; to him the long corridors and spacious rooms seemed filled with Eric's presence, it was almost as though his cousin's spirit haunted the old pile and prevented his successor's enjoyment.

Not that Dene believed in ghosts, or had any superstitious leanings; in the broad daylight he would have scoffed at such ideas, but in the quiet evening hours, when the house seemed yet more lonesome and deserted, and he could hear his own footsteps re-echo through the oak galleries, Dene never liked to walk about much alone; it seemed to him that he heard another foot-step behind him, and that he saw a face mockingly reflected beside his own in the large mirrors; and both face and foot-step were Eric's.

"Do stay and dine with me," he pleaded to Mr. Armstrong, about a fortnight after his loneliness began; the agent had come up in the afternoon on business and lingered talking with Lord Carlyon till the short autumn day was closing in.

Mr. Armstrong pleaded his morning dress, his mother's anxiety, and so on; but Lord Carlyon quietly overruled these scruples. He never dressed for dinner when alone, he said gravely, and a messenger should be sent to tell Mrs. Armstrong her son was remaining for the evening. So the matter was settled, and the two gentlemen strolled into the billiard room.

Dene recovered his spirits; it was not grief for Eric that oppressed him, but an utter horror of his lonely surroundings.

They had played two or three games before the butler announced dinner, and they adjourned to the dining-room.

"I almost wonder you don't dine in the library when you are alone," said Armstrong, on whom the contrast between the size of the huge room and the number of the party struck with a sudden chill; "you'd be ever so much cosier here now; it seems as if all your old ancestors in the pictures ought to come down from their gilt frames and join us to help fill up blanks."

"I don't like the library," said Dene carelessly; "in fact I'm thinking of having several alterations made; the morning-room and library I intend to have completely pulled down; the

first will be converted into a music room, and the latter I shall make into a large hall for dancing."

Pearman was in attendance, and of course heard the suggestion; the vandalism wounded the old servant in his tenderest feelings, for the library was one of the show rooms of the Court; its beautifully carved panelling being almost of priceless value, while the morning-room had been furnished for the last Countess Carlyon, and was just the sort of sanctum for a lady; however, butlers of course have no right to express an opinion, so Pearman contained his indignation; not so young Armstrong, who being of a very good family, and possessing fair private means, had the courage of his opinions.

"Besides," as he told a friend afterwards in describing the interview, "I knew the fellow had been at his wits' end to get a living just before, and the idea of his having the power to ruin such a lovely place as Carlyon Court seemed awful, and I couldn't help giving him a piece of my mind."

"Well, you know," was Mr. Armstrong's reply to Dene's announcement, "if you do that you'll just destroy the two most celebrated rooms at Carlyon Court, the only parts of the whole house that can justly claim to be historical."

"I suppose I have a right to do what I like with my own house," said Dene coldly, "and I shall certainly see about the alterations as soon as possible."

A footman came in and delivered a message in a low tone to the butler; and Pearman with a somewhat perturbed countenance told his master a stranger who would not give his name was waiting to see him.

"I should not have disturbed you with his message, my lord," said the old servant, "but for his persistency; Druce," meaning the footman, "says he declares it to be business of life or death."

Lord Carlyon looked puzzled; he glanced from the servants to Armstrong, but no one volunteered a suggestion, he was left to the unaided resources of his own mind; at last he said slowly—

"You had better show the person into my office-room, Pearman. I hope," and he smiled pleasantly to his guest, "that you will excuse my seeming rudeness, Mr. Armstrong."

He left the room, ushered by the tall footman, Druce. Pearman, who had just put the desert on the table, lingered a few minutes to look after Mr. Armstrong's comfort.

He knew the agent had been looked on as a personal friend by his last master, and the old servant, who had not taken very kindly to the new Earl, felt that George Armstrong might sympathise with him in his regret. He lowered his voice as though conscious of the enormity of "talking" to Lord Carlyon's guests, and said, anxiously,—

"Do you think he means it, sir? It's enough to make my poor master turn in his grave."

"It's the strangest fancy I ever heard of, Pearman," was the reply. George Armstrong was not given to talking to servants; but he regarded the old butler more as a humble friend than anything else; "but from the look on Lord Carlyon's face when he spoke I should say his mind was quite made up. Why, he seemed positively angry with me for attempting a remonstrance."

Pearman gave his head a strange-looking nod, as though he had expected the answer. Then he looked carefully round the room, to make sure perhaps no one could overhear him, and finally said in a low tone,—

"I believe the Earl's scared of those two rooms, and that's at the bottom of it."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"There's many people, Mr. Armstrong, who get a bit scared after a sudden death, and I've known for above a bit that Lord Carlyon hated going about the house after dark alone. He's left off dressing for dinner. He never sits here till he goes to bed; and since Lady Darnley and the others went, I've noticed two things: he has never once entered either the library or the morning-room."

"Pearman, you're making much ado about nothing," said Armstrong, cheerfully. "Everyone knows the morning-room is suited to ladies."



LORD CARLYON LOOKED LIKE A MAN THAT HAD SEEN A GHOST.

use, and as Lord Carlyon is not fond of reading there's nothing to take him to the library."

"Maybe, but listen to me, sir. It was in the library that the late Earl spent the last afternoon of his life. It was from there he went out on the walk from which he was never to return. It was in the morning-room where his poor dead body rested when it was brought home."

"You're as superstitious as an old woman," said Armstrong, reprovingly, "you'll be saying next that Carlyon Court is haunted by my poor lost friend's spirit."

"I believe it is haunted, for the present Lord Carlyon," was the grave reply.

"Nonsense!"

"I believe it, sir."

"The cousins were on the best of terms."

"Maybe I'm not going to say that the verdict at the inquest was wrong. Why, Mr. Armstrong, if I thought this Lord Carlyon had a hand in my master's death I'd not stay here to serve him. I'd cut off my right hand first."

"Lord Carlyon could have had no hand in it," said Mr. Armstrong, gravely. "Pearman, you hardly know what you are saying."

"No," said the old butler, gravely, "I'm not denying the gun went off by accident; but, Mr. Armstrong, when my master left this house he was agitated and ill at ease. If he hadn't been full of restless trouble he wouldn't have walked so carelessly as to stumble, and so let the gun go off. And I meant to say that those who put him in that nervous irritated state led to his death, and for them the old house he loved so well may well be haunted."

"Pearman," said George Armstrong, gravely, "I won't pretend to misunderstand you. You believe that Lord Carlyon discovered his cousin's attentions to Miss Belden, and that doubts of his betrothed's faith made him leave home in a state of restless excitement, which, probably, led to the accident. You may be right, the chances are that you are wrong. Anyway, let me advise you to lock those doubts in your own breast, and never let them escape. It would be no true kind-

ness to the dead man we both loved, to bring idle gossip on the heads of the woman he worshipped and the kinsman he trusted. Be guided by me, and let the dead past bury its dead."

"I will, sir, but—I long to be out of this. The changes Lord Carlyon talks of so glibly will be a bitter regret to me."

George Armstrong was quite a young man, but no experience could have served him better in telling him what to say to Pearman than his own good heart.

"Make the best of things," he said kindly to the old servant; "you have been in the Carlyon family so many years that your leaving it must bring censure on the new Earl. I don't like him as I liked his cousin; somehow I don't feel he's half the man poor Eric was; but remember we know nothing against him, and that he is in a most painful and difficult position. The eyes of all the neighbours are on him to see how he bears his new honours, and if—" he hesitated, "your theory is correct, Lord Carlyon must bear about with him a burden of remorse heavy enough to blight his life without our adding any further to its weight."

He put out his hand frankly, and the butler pressed it gratefully.

"I'm glad I spoke to you, sir, you've done me a power of good."

He retreated then, and George Armstrong waited on, wondering what detained the Earl; half-an-hour seemed to him over long for an interview with a man who refused his name.

"Perhaps," thought the agent musingly, "it is a creditor; if report speaks true, Dene Langley had a plentiful supply of those, but then the debts of the clerk would be as nothing to the Earl of Carlyon. Why doesn't he give the beggar a cheque and get rid of him?"

Nine o'clock came but no host, George Armstrong would have started for home, but hardly liked to do so without saying good-night to the Earl. At last the door opened, and Lord Carlyon came in.

But how changed from the handsome debon-

naire young host who had left him an hour before; there were lines of pain, age, and of shame too, upon the regular features; Dene sank into an armchair by the fire, and seemed as one smitten with an ague.

"I have treated you very badly, Armstrong, but I was detained—someone came from London to see me on business."

"I was just thinking of taking my departure," replied the agent, "it is getting late."

"Oh sit down and have some coffee, it's not ten yet."

The coffee was brought, and Pearman poured it out, which was a good thing as Lord Carlyon's hand shook too much to have managed the task. George Armstrong sitting opposite to the young Earl decided he looked like a man who had seen a ghost.

"Going?" exclaimed Dene, when the agent rose, "well you have a long walk so I mustn't detain you."

Something in the careworn anxious face, in the strangely agitated voice, touched George Armstrong's heart.

"If I were you, Lord Carlyon, I'd get someone down to step; or run up to town yourself; this house is a big dreary place for a lonely man, and you are not looking at all well."

"Well," repeated Dene to himself, as he got back to the dining-room fire, "I wonder I don't look like a condemned criminal, I'm sure I feel like one. If Fortune could see me now, even she would admit I am punished enough. . . . Why I would give my life to blot out the last month. I am only twenty-five, and I shall have to carry my miserable secret to my life's end."

He poured himself out some brandy and drank it off neat at a draught. Alas! in these days Lord Carlyon often needed to brace his nerves with stimulants before he could walk alone across the large hall and up the broad stairs to bed; old Pearman was not so far out when he said that for the Earl the Court was haunted by his cousin's spirit.

(To be continued.)





"HUSH! WE WILL NEVER, NEVER SPEAK OF THE PAST AGAIN," SAID SUSY, TREMULOUSLY.

## LOVE IN A MAZE.

—10:—

### CHAPTER XXI.

#### A PROPOSAL.

How it was they got there, they could never perhaps clearly remember; yet certain it is that, within the next three minutes or so, Douglas and Susy found themselves comparatively safe and dry within the hoary walls of the ruined temple.

However, Douglas Rex had managed it somehow or other—and, after all, it was the nearest place of refuge—in the confusion and panic and atmospheric gloom which had so suddenly overwhelmed the gay luncheon-party, when the order of the moment had been *sautez qui peut*; and everybody had fled to the first shelter which occurred to him.

Most of them as precipitately as circumstances would allow, had made for the lonely inn, and a few remembered the moss-grown grotto and its adjacent shed where they had scribbled their names in the morning.

And thus it came about that in an astonishingly short time the jovial woodland board was utterly forsaken—deserted by all, that is, save the three impassive, unfortunate serving men, who, of course, must remain at the post of duty to look after the plate and the remnants of the feast.

Yet no matter for the present where the rest may be, here, safe, sound, and dry—though the awful thunder still cracked and roared above their heads, and the greenish-blue lightning streaks sought out and illumined, in serpent-like visitations, every nook and cranny of their dark retreat—were Susy Dawson and Douglas Rex.

And when Susy recovered her wits and her breath, both having taken temporary flight in the general helter-skelter, and she found herself alone with Douglas in the dim grey ruin, with heavy masses of tangled wet ivy intensifying everywhere the ghostly gloom of the place, she came at once unwontedly nervous and fidgety

and observed to her companion, with a little forced laugh altogether unlike her own,—

"Oh, Mr. Rex, this is really dreadful! What a cruel thing to happen at a birthday treat! I wonder where all the others have taken shelter, and whether they are all safe like ourselves! Shall we venture out a moment and see—Oh!" and she uttered a little shriek, hid her eyes fearfully, and turned her drooped head to the wall.

"I think, if we are wise, we shall stay where we are," said Douglas, earnestly, "now we are here."

"Gracious! Why, how—What on earth is this!" Susy murmured presently, putting up her hands to her throat; for she seemed to be growing uncomfortably warm.

"You are finding my overcoat too much now, I am afraid," Douglas answered apologetically. "The truth is, I—I wrapped it round you as we ran, you know."

"I—I didn't know—I had no idea—I mean it was very kind and thoughtful of you all the same. Still I—I think I can manage without it now," Susy told him rather indistinctly.

In a moment Douglas had stooped and relieved her of the cumbersome rough travelling garment, which seemed to be composed entirely of huge flapped pockets and a hood as roomy as a sack, and flung it over his own shoulder.

As he did so, another vivid lightning-flash lit up the gloomy ruin; and the thunder rolled majestically over the great old forest, and the rain drops beat like shot upon the clustering ivy, and splashed downward as noisily into the depths of the hidden well.

Susy had gasped out "O-o-h!" again, and Douglas inquired anxiously:

"Are you frightened still? You are really nervous of the lightning, then?"

"Well, I must confess I do not like it," she replied. "And—and it is all so dark and ghostly here, Mr. Rex. Oh, did you see that! Truly this is almost as bad a storm as one gets out in Santa Rosa!"

She was so sweet and shy with him in the

lonesome place, and withal so friendly, that Douglas Rex was feeling bolder and more self-confident in the somewhat singular situation than he could ever have anticipated or believed possible of himself.

"Do you have them very bad out there, then?" he asked her softly.

"At rare intervals, very bad, indeed," Susy assured him, rather hurriedly. "But, as a rule, lovely weather prevails again afterwards."

"Let me stand here in front of you, Miss Susy—right before you, with my arms stretched out, and my hands upon the wall. There—so! Now, cover your eyes, close, and you'll see nothing of it whatever," suggested Douglas, his voice growing deep and unsteady as he leaned protectingly over Susy—so unavoidably touching her—to demonstrate his idea for her further comfort and security.

"Thank you," said she in a grateful whisper; and obeyed him straightway.

And then, ere long, came flash—flash! flash—flash—flash! the vivid steel-blue zig-zag gleams following momentarily one on the other, with a mighty hollow roaring throughout the whole of the heavens, and with the troubled earth groaning once more and vibrating beneath their very feet.

In a paroxysm of fresh wild terror Susy clung to Douglas, and instinctively hid her frightened eyes upon his breast. This was more—he being only a young man terribly and irrevocably in love—than Douglas Rex could stand unmoved.

So, in that self-same instant of mutual irresponsibility, his long arms dropped from the wall behind her, and caught her passionately to his heart and held her there. As passionately he kissed her many times.

"My darling! My own love!" cried Douglas recklessly. And though Susy answered him nothing, neither at the same time did she repulse him.

When their senses returned to them, Susy herself was the first of the two to speak; and what

she said, was in the weakest and shyest of whispers—

"Oh, Douglas, I am so happy now!"

And then other remarkable and interesting explanations followed this tender confession.

"Susy, my own beloved," Douglas said, solemnly, "on that never-to-be-forgotten day when my eyes first beheld you, I loved you dear; loved you for ever more thenceforward—but hopelessly so, as I then thought. Did you not speak to me of your own sweet accord, bright, true, words of Christian faith and hope, bidding me be assured that if I would only trust in a Divine dispensation all my troubles would through that medium be surmounted, and everything would come right in the end? Was not your coming to Hogarth Chambers on that ever-to-be remembered afternoon, the happy means of preserving me, a poor, weak, despairing coward, from the terrible—"

Raising herself upon tiptoe she laid her little hand upon his beard, over his lips, so peremptorily shutting in the words, the always-to-be forbidden words, that were about to escape just then.

"Hush! we will never, never speak of that again. It is over—past—done with for ever, you know," she said tremulously. "We will speak, dear, of pleasanter, holier things. Douglas, on that self-same day I loved you too; and you have dwelt in my thoughts ever since!"

"My darling," he murmured passionately, holding her closely once more in his arms and kissing the fair bright face so winsomely upturned to his own.

"And now," Susy said, with a more business-like air, "I will give you a disagreeable surprise by way of change, sir!"

"Come what may, say what you please, I care not," cried Douglas fondly, "so long as you do not tell me that you love Lord Lowater."

Susy's scorn was tremendous.

"Lord Lowater! Oh, Douglas! A very kind and well-meaning young man, I grant; but so foolish! You must, indeed, think meanly of me and of my intellect if you can imagine seriously for one moment that I could ever marry Lord Lowater."

"You would be Countess of Bearwarden, you know, some day," suggested Douglas gloomily.

"Ah—poof!" returned Susy loyally, "it won't bear thinking about; because I prefer to be Mrs. Douglas Rex."

"He is very fond of you, though, my own beloved," persisted Douglas jealously.

"That is a totally different matter, sir! No; what I want particularly to tell you, and to impress upon you is this. You have not asked an heiress to marry you, Douglas—far from it! On the contrary, you have asked quite a poor and portionless girl to share your life and your fortunes. Yes, *parole d'honneur*, dear, that is the sober truth!"

"I should not, I could not have asked you, Susy, if I had merely thought you were rich. But I knew that it was not so," said Douglas, simply. "I have well understood all along that it was the elder Miss Dawson, your aunt Betty, who was the rich one, the great heiress of the two."

"Yes—quite right," murmured Susy, hiding her glowing face again on Douglas's waistcoat. "My dear father, knowing thoroughly how great are the influence and the temptation of wealth, and what unprincipled creatures are men of the world on the look-out for rich wives, left me, as it were, entirely dependent upon Aunt Betty's generosity. He had strong, grave reasons for passing over me, his own child, in this odd manner; but he said—he said that it would be best in the end. My dear father well knew too, at the time of making that strange will of his, that Aunt Betty herself was the most unlikely person in the world to behave in any wise shabbily towards her own niece."

"Why, Susy, sweetheart, what does it matter? Listen, now, for I have something to tell you," said Douglas proudly. "Trust me, I would not have spoken to you, else, as I have spoken to-day. My dearest, we shall not be so poor, not so really poor, after all! Do you know, by the second post I got a letter from Messrs. Lynx and

Lane; and in most courteous terms they offer me a thousand pounds for my next novel; that is to say, provided the story has not previously appeared as a serial in any magazine or newspaper, and the MS., in completed form, be placed in their hands towards the end of next January."

"And of course you said 'yes'!" exclaimed Susy, with eager sympathy.

"I telegraphed 'yes' immediately—in fact, just before we left Monkhood to come here—and one of Rudolf's grooms galloped off with the message," Douglas explained, as gleefully as a school-boy. "A second edition of *The Pagan Bride*, they say, will be wanted next week."

"You have now got your foot upon the ladder of success," said Susy tenderly, playing with one of Douglas's coat buttons and twisting it round and round—"and you will soon be rich as well as famous. And then, Douglas, how proud I shall be of you."

"Ah, what have I done to merit such good fortune!" cried Douglas Rex, and the indefinable sound of tears was in his voice as he gazed downward, his whole soul shining in his wild glad eyes, upon the dear sweet face of Susy Dawson. "What have I ever done to deserve—"

"Meaning the thousand pounds! Why, Douglas dear, it strikes me that we shall be really well off in the end!" interrupted she quaintly.

"Meaning your own dear love, my sweet," smiled he.

"Oh, you are here then, are you?" exclaimed a surly voice somewhere quite dreadfully near to them. "Lady Winterbourne sent me to look for you. She says it is time to go; and they are all just having some tea."

Douglas and Susy were of course much startled, and looked hastily round about them. They were certainly amazed in more ways than one. For one thing, they discovered that the storm, which during the past hour or so had, without their being in the least conscious of the change, cleared pleasantly off, the strong warm wind winnowing the heavy thunder-clouds, so that patches of fair blue sky were once more visible through the top-most drenched branches of Rockstone Forest; for another, there was Lord Lowater looking in at them from the ruin entrance in a very suspicious and highly disagreeable manner indeed.

Susy forthwith began to talk at random, saying the first thing that occurred to her in an awkward moment.

"Tea!" cried she, "how delicious! But will not the ground and the sticks and things all be rather damp, Lord Lowater?"

"Impossible to have it out of doors, of course. Everybody is at the inn," Lord Lowater answered huffily. "Obliged to have it there in the circumstances, and we shall all be starting almost directly. Come along, Miss Susy; I will take you safely back. We are keeping 'em all waiting, don't you know?"

"Come along, Mr. Rex," echoed Susy sedately, turning upon Douglas a lovely, encouraging glance, which poor Lowater could not see, and perhaps it was as well that he did not.

Lord Lowater scowled fiercely at Douglas, and Douglas glared back at the jealous viscount.

So Susy, laughing merrily, and chattering frankly to both lovers as she tripped between them, went off with the two men through the trailing undergrowth and the wet moss and wood-weeds towards the forest inn.

Outwardly, it is true, she was gay and careless enough; but inwardly she was desperately nervous and frightened. They looked at each other in such a terrible manner every now and then—glances full of enmity and bloodthirsty desire!

A vague, horrible notion soon seized on the soul of Susy, and chilled it through and through—they "wanted to fight" perhaps, and would do so ere long! How dreadful, to be sure; how disgraceful!—such scandal must be prevented at any cost!

Therefore, with a mock brightness very hard to keep up, Susy stepped onward lightly between the two men; and, in this wise, for a brief while at any rate, she succeeded in keeping them apart.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### ANOTHER PROPOSAL.

IN the general rush and helter-skelter from the luncheon scene, Colin Chepstowe had tucked Aunt Betty's slender hand and arm under his own, and, pressing them very closely to his side, had said valiantly,—

"And now, dear Miss Dawson, we must run for it!"

"Whither?" said she quickly, scared and bewildered like everyone else in the rapidly-deepening gloom, which was illumined only by the forked lightning about every half minute. "Don't let us remain under the trees, Mr. Chepstowe. It is always dangerous, you know," she added, running by Colin Chepstowe's side with an activity and a freedom of limb remarkable in a woman past middle age.

Ahead of them—a dim army of scudding forms in the blinding grey rain—they could descry their companions in adversity all making for the lonely inn as hard as human legs could take them thither.

The poor fat countess went lumbering along in the rear-guard, and seemed indeed to experience no inconsiderable difficulty in keeping up with the rest. But fear is an admirable propeller.

Young Colin, callous youth like, grinned at the sad spectacle.

"Lowater's mother wobbles awfully, doesn't she?" said he; "and just do observe the patch behind where she seated herself in the cream-dish! Why, she can't run a bit, dear Miss Dawson—not like you!" he added affectionately, squeezing Aunt Betty's arm to his side again.

"In Santa Rosa Island," said Miss Dawson, rather jerkily—for, after all, nimble as a person in other respects may be, it is certainly no light accomplishment to run and to talk with ease at one and the same time—"in Santa Rosa we ran and jumped, played tennis and cricket, rode, boated, shot, and swam every day in the sea. All the superior and the better educated natives out there, you see, believe in physical training for women almost from earliest infancy, and they are a fine race accordingly."

"How I should love to go to Santa Rosa!" said Colin, fervently. He was thinking to himself, though the thought remained unuttered, that they were having a fine race just then.

"You may go there some day, Mr. Chepstowe. Who can tell?"

"With you?" said he, putting his cropped head very near to her small wavy gray one. "Do you mean with you?"

"Well, I don't know about that," returned Elizabeth Dawson, briskly; "but this much I promise you. If Susy and I should ever go back there—and it is not at all unlikely that we may do so at some future time or other, in order to see our man of business, who is also a dear old friend, and to look into our affairs with him over in the Island there—I promise you, I say, that we will invite you to pay us a visit. We have a charming summer villa upon the sea-shore, called The Pavilion—will you come, Mr. Chepstowe?"

"To the other end of the world, if you bid me," said Colin, earnestly, although this was not quite what he had meant or wanted. However, he would try to lead up to the real great question again by-and-by.

Meanwhile they had reached the premises of the "Chumleigh Arms," through the hospitable open doorway of which the flying squadron ahead of them had already disappeared. They heard, later on, how the Countess of Bearwarden had fallen exhausted into the arms of the landlord in the passage, and how her ladyship had herself laughed as heartily as anyone at the accident, which had threatened to be a serious matter for both of them. For the Countess was large and heavy, and the landlord was just the reverse.

"Why—where—what in the world are you doing, Mr. Chepstowe!" exclaimed Aunt Betty suddenly. Her eyes not unnaturally had been fixed upon the wide inn entrance before them now scarcely twenty yards off. But young Colin had conceived matters otherwise.



He had espied The Granary brougham, standing vacant and homeless in company with an equally deserted phaeton, there in an open cart-house adjoining the stables of the hostelry. Here, then, thought he, was surely the coveted opportunity, and he literally dragged Miss Dawson towards her own empty brougham.

With the hand that was free he opened the carriage-door, and said, breathlessly,—

"Let us get in here! Quick—or you will be wet through!"

Miss Dawson, really anxious to obtain shelter as speedily as practicable, at once obeyed him without reflection. But as she stepped into the brougham and seated herself, and her companion followed and shut the door after him, she said with some asperity—second thoughts occurring,—

"I do think you are extremely ridiculous, Mr. Chepstowe. We might just as well have run on indoors with the rest, and been cosy and warm and dry, instead of sitting out here like—like—a couple of owls in an ivy-bush, in this damp, draughty, horrible old cart-house!"—with a shiver of real disgust.

Colin, in a business-like manner, pulled up the windows and drew down the blinds.

"Oh, no!" said he, in his most earnest and soulful way, "you are wrong, believe me. We are much better off out here—alone—by ourselves, dear Miss Dawson. I'll bet you anything you like that they have all gone crowding into one room, and the men are ordering drinks—hideous poison that they know perfectly well beforehand they will not be able to touch—'for the good of the house,' don't you know? And, bless you, they are all jabbering at once, and making no end of a row, and the gov'nor and the poor *mater* are sparring away as usual, and—and, well, just think, dear Miss Dawson, how stuffy it must be!"

"I think," returned Miss Dawson coolly, promptly letting down the window and pulling up the blind on her side of the brougham, "that if you were allowed to have your own foolish way we should soon find it pretty stuff, in here."

The Honourable Colin looked aggrieved.

"I did it," said he mournfully, "to shut out the lightning and protect you; and I am told that I am foolish for my pains. How cruel!"

"You see, I like air. And," explained Miss Dawson, "I am not like Susy. I am not in the least afraid of lightning."

Nevertheless—the latter part of this statement being strictly insincere—she leaned well back in her corner and covered her eyes with her pocket-handkerchief.

Then Aunt Betty found something touching her waist—cautiously, uncertainly. So she quietly dropped the handkerchief into her lap, lowered her own hands, and forcibly removed young Colin's arm from about her person.

"Dearest," he expostulated, "you are very hard with me, very unkind. Why do you snub me so, when—you know that I love you—Betty!"

At this audacious avowal, Elizabeth Dawson sat bolt upright.

"Colin Chepstowe," she said stiffly; "I am horribly disappointed in you—utterly ashamed of you. Let me out."

"No, no, no! Hear me, Betty."

"I won't! Let me go—let me out this instant, Mr. Chepstowe! My gown, I find, is quite wet, and I wish to go into the inn and dry it. Your stupendous folly, else, will be the means of my catching my death of cold. Truly a fine way of showing your regard for me!"

"You shall not escape me yet, wet or dry. I must speak out and unburthen my heart to you sooner or later, dearest Betty."

"In all my life, Mr. Chepstowe—in all my life hitherto—I have never had the misfortune to encounter your equal for cool impertinence. Never! A boy of your years daring to call a woman of my age *Betty*! It is preposterous. It is absolutely outrageous. Why, you quite too utterly disrespectful *child*," cried she, with a sudden airy playfulness that Colin found insufferable—"guess, now, how old I am?"

"Guess how old you are! 'Pon my word and honour I cannot," said he boldly. "But this I'll tell you. Whatever it is, you don't look it!"

Miss Dawson tried to reassume a stiff and sober

demeanour; but she failed completely in the effort, and ended by laughing heartily.

So then it was that Colin, taking quick advantage of the change of mood in her, slipped from the seat by her side and knelt upon the carriage mat at her feet.

He locked his hands together upon her knee; and the lightning at the moment flashed and quivered upon his boyish, beardless, upturned face.

"Dear Miss Dawson—Betty, love, you must listen to me; you shall listen to me—"

She fell back once more in her corner, and once more hid her eyes with her pocket handkerchief.

"Oh, very well, then," she murmured resignedly from behind it. "Since it has come to 'must' and 'shall,' I suppose I must submit to my fate—tiresome as the whole business is! Of course it is the very height of absurdity, our sitting out here together in this dark stationary carriage, and I hope to heaven that nobody will come along and find us before we can get away. For goodness sake make haste—"

"Dearest, I am not sitting. I am kneeling lowly here at your—"

"I know it," said the pitiless voice from behind the pocket-handkerchief; "and a most ridiculous object you look, too, in that lowly position, as you call it."

"Kneeling," pleaded Colin softly, disregarding the heartless interruption, "and asking you, Betty, to be my wife—my own dear wife, Betty—the future Lady Winterbourne, of Winterbourne Chase."

"I fancy you must be out of your senses, Colin," said the voice in the gloom, calmly. "Take my advice, and get up directly—"

"Never!—until you speak more kindly. Say 'yes,' dearest. You know that I love you to distraction, Betty!"

"Indeed, I know nothing of the sort. And let me once more remind you, sir, that I will not be called *Betty* by a boy like you. It is hatefully familiar and grossly disrespectful, to say the very least. Many ladies of my age so insulted would simply box your ears, or—or—complain to your mother, who I suspect has had something to do with it all," said the voice indignantly.

"A man of my years and discretion, dear Miss Dawson," struggling with a jerk to his feet, and with a decidedly sulky air reseating himself by her side—"is surely free enough and wise enough to choose his own wife without bringing his mother into the question!"

"A wife! Mr. Chepstowe! Do for pity's sake," said Aunt Betty in bored accents, coming warily as it were from behind the shielding handkerchief, as the lightning by this time seemed to be growing less vivid, and the thunder gloom outside to belittling and rolling away, "let us hear no more of this nonsense. I am sick of it," cried she petulantly.

"I think," said he, real tears of disappointment and chagrin dimming his sight in spite of him; he was only three-and-twenty on that day, poor boy! "I think that—that on the whole you have treated me abominably. Yes, you have, Betty!—you may say what you will. And if you call me Colin, as you do, why, I shall call you, Betty, that's all," said he, with childish perversity. "You have tempted and lured me on; flirted with me—yes, you have, and you can't deny it, Betty—encouraged me in every conceivable way, only to throw me over in the end and make a fool of me in this cruel manner. And I—and I," said Colin, with difficulty swallowing a sob, and mad with himself for having to do it, "have grown to love you with all my heart; I couldn't help it; and I do love you, and I always shall, though you may be twice or three times as old as I am; I don't care. Look at that immensely rich and popular Lady Aurelian! She married a man young enough to be her grandson. She asked him to have her, they say, because she knew he had not the courage to ask her; and no two married people—as all the world acknowledges—could be more happy as man and wife than they are now."

Aunt Betty all at once felt sorry for the lad, conscious, it may be, that she had not, for various reasons of her own, been altogether blameless in

the affair; and she laid a friendly reasoning hand upon the young man's flannel sleeve.

"Colin, dear," she said gently, "I don't believe it. A more unnatural union than Captain and Lady Aurelian's the world never saw. Now don't be offended—I am going to ask you something. Has not Lady Winterbourne herself had a voice in this foolish business? a finger in the pie? Honestly now, in plain language, was it not she who put you up to it Colin? Somehow, do you know, I cannot help thinking that Lady Winterbourne—in the mistaken belief that I am a woman of fortune—is in a great measure responsible for your—your—what shall I call it?—well, your disappointment and mortification of to-day."

"My birthday and all too!" muttered Colin, moodily. "On such an occasion I really think you might have been kinder to me, Betty."

"You are evasive. You are not honest and straightforward, Colin."

"You are always so, of course," he retorted bitterly. "You have been so throughout, we know."

"If you do not choose to answer me, it is not of the least consequence," said she frostily; and withdrew her hand from his sleeve.

"Well, all that I shall tell you is this," he said then, in a dogged low tone—"I began in fun, I own it; but I have ended in solemn earnest, and there is the truth! I love you, Betty; I would marry you to-morrow if you would have me; and we would be as happy together as Lady Aurelian and her young husband."

"Faugh! Do not talk to me of Lady Aurelian. What I desire to know is this: Has not Lady Winterbourne, from the first, and all along, been at the bottom of this mischievous scheme? Confess now, Colin—am I not right?"

Her frank, keen tone and manner thoroughly disarmed him; and Colin Chepstowe, in his calf-love as pliable as the boy she called him, forthwith became himself, and hers wholly, once more. He looked sheepish, and his head went down to his breast.

"She said it would be—would be a prudent thing to do. But I love you for yourself alone, all the same, Betty."

"Thinking, absolutely believing, of course, that I am a woman of substance!"

"Yes," he confessed shamefacedly; "but I love you for yourself alone, all the same, Bet—"

"Then tell Lady Winterbourne," said Miss Dawson, with her gay clear laugh, "with my compliments and regrets, please, that she has made an egregious blunder. I am a penniless woman, Colin, a woman without a farthing. But my dearest and most generous niece Susy has a fortune of half-a-million; and I am simply her guardian and trustee—or rather her nominal trustee, let us say. The real trustee ship rests with Monsieur Miguel, the black lawyer, our old friend and agent out in Santa Rosa Island. *Voilà tout*, Colin!"

It was now young Colin's turn to sit bolt upright and stare.

"No! *Woolly*? By Jove! But you must be joking, dear Miss Dawson!" he managed to get out at last.

"Not I. I am as much in earnest as you are, Colin," laughed she; "and I have told you only the strict truth." Then she added more gravely, yet with a smile that was very sweet and winning—"I suppose, now, you will no longer care to have the first waltz with me by-and-by? But you *did* ask me for it, you know."

"Oh, do not fancy me such a cad!" he cried, capturing her pretty white hand. "If—if I may not be your lover, why, I can still be your friend and—a sort of younger brother, cannot I? Do not cast me off altogether," Colin pleaded. "And I say—look here—I may call you 'Betty' sometimes, after all, mayn't I? Oh, yes—it is such a pretty name, and suits you down to the ground, don't you know?"—very softly, in a coaxing undertone.

"Oh, indeed not! indeed not! I never could allow such a liberty—at least, never before people—it would be highly improper—"

Outer voices at that moment became distinctly audible; were drawing nearer and nearer; were heard close alongside the stationary brougham in

the cart-house; and then they came to a halt by the carriage-step.

Someone said:

"Mr. Douglas Rex and Miss Susy Dawson, I hear, have been discovered safe and dry in the ruin. Lord Lowater found them—"

"If," put in the careless, clear voice of Rudolf De Vere, "the other lost ones are not here, I am sure, then, I don't know where else we can hunt for them. However, let us see."

He threw open the brougham-door as he spoke, and looked in. A little involuntary shriek of annoyance and dismay issued from the shadowy interior.

"Oh, yes," said Rudolf indifferently, with a half backward glance at the chattering search-party who had accompanied him. "We need trouble ourselves no further on their account. It is all right. Here they are!"

## CHAPTER XXIII.

LADY WINTERBOURNE IS PERPLEXED.

ALTHOUGH it had been previously settled that, the picnic in Rockstone Forest over, the whole birthday party should adjourn straightway to The Granary, there to wind up the day's rejoicings with an informal dance in the spacious old-fashioned drawing-room with the perfect shining black floor, the unlooked-for thunderstorm, however, had upset Miss Dawson's calculation, and had rendered her agreeable arrangement an impracticability.

For thin boots had become soaked and muddy, wholly disreputable-looking, pretty summer frocks, donned for the occasion, were no longer fresh and attractive, but looked limp and dragged, and altogether unsightly for a birthday dance in a lovely old Queen Anne drawing-room, such as that at The Granary.

There was no help for it; the party must separate for awhile and repair the mischief and disaster which the unkind weather had inflicted.

Fortunately for the Chumleigh girls, they were near home, and they soon vanished, promising Miss Dawson, however, that they would re-appear at The Granary as early as a transformation could be effected.

It was now nearly six o'clock, and dusk was coming on apace. Great masses of velvety plum-coloured cloud, edged with fiery gold, lay banked in the western sky, looking like Titanic fragments of the tempestuous war-clouds which had so lately rolled onward overhead.

And high now in the clear calm heaven spread over Rockstone Forest, fast growing black and lonesome in the gathering twilight, hung the hunter's moon—wan, serene, and not yet at her full.

Eventide promised to be alike restful and beautiful, now that the troubled noon-time was dead.

Everyone was busy preparing for the return journey, seeking coats and wraps and putting them on, and, amongst themselves, rather noisily making up their different parties for the homeward drive; and the hinds and helpers at the "Chumleigh Arms" lounged out and loitered about to see the fine company depart, and to pick up largess as they drove away.

Albeit the Misses Dawson, aunt and niece alike, had appeared so tardily at the unceremonious tea-drinking in the inn parlour, they were fortunate enough to find still left there some tea that was by no means to be contemned.

"Really, it is better than you deserve," had said the countess, playfully, as she gave them their cups, "for frightening us all by your hiding away so long. We thought you were struck by the lightning, or something!"

She knew—for Lowater had grumbled his news into her ear—that Susy and Douglas had been unearthed by the wishing-well in the Druid ruin, but she did not yet know that he, Lowater, had unearthed them 'too late.' That was a treat in store.

Aunt Betty explained naively that "they could not help it." Indeed, Mr. Rudolf De Vere had found herself and Mr. Chepstowe sheltered snugly in the empty brougham in the cart-house,

both of them being exceedingly nervous and alarmed at the terrible storm.

And where had Mr. De Vere got to now?

Oh, Miss Dawson believed, but was not sure, that he had gone to look after his phaeton and another vehicle from the hall; for, naturally, everybody was in a hurry, now that the evening had cleared up so fairly, to exchange his damp, smirched garments for others fresher and drier; the men in their tweeds and tennis flannels, she supposed airily, had come off worse than the women in their summer frocks; for, in protecting the latter, as they were, of course, bound to do, they had fared but ill themselves!

Well as she loved him, it was nevertheless with infinite relief that Susy Dawson saw Douglas quit her side—although in the circumstances he could leave her with only a silent hand-pressure, which yet was eloquent enough—and join Rudolf in the stable-yard, where the Monkshood horses were being led out; for the jealous Viscount was as a leech at his hungriest, and would not be shaken off.

His mother, the countess, watched him with high hope and pride, and confidently anticipated a triumphant end to the wooing at The Granary dance by-and-by. In fact had it not been for that horrible hurly-burly in the forest, which had upset everything and everybody, all might have been well and satisfactorily settled by now. This Lady Bearwarden honestly believed.

But Colin, on the other hand, by his queer behaviour, sorely puzzled the uneasy Lady Winterbourne.

He avoided his mother in a very remarkable manner, and absolutely refused to meet her eye, which, full of inquiry and dumb anxiety, was constantly seeking his own.

She had been a spectator to Rudolf's droll discovery in the cart-house, and had had the gratification of seeing Rudolf himself light a cigar and stroll off in the most leisurely way towards the stables, as if—the lost ones found and in friendly hands—he had no further interest either in them or in their hiding-place.

The hunt for them was over; and now if they were in need of anything or anyone, why, other people could attend to them; they didn't want him. He had exclaimed with the utmost indifference, "It is all right—here they are," and then he had wandered away and apparently the next minute forgotten all about them.

He had not spoken a word to Miss Dawson, nor asked whether she was wet or tired, or frightened, or anything.

And Colin himself? Certainly he appeared to be upon the best and friendliest terms with Miss Dawson; there could be no doubt of it; and, moreover, did—was it possible?—could Lady Winterbourne's ears have played her false—deceived her at all—did or did she not actually overhear Miss Dawson murmur softly and kindly, when her companion assisted her to step from the brougham, "Thank you, Colin!"

It was all very odd, and far from satisfactory, and Lady Winterbourne was sorely perplexed; because the next moment Colin had deserted Miss Dawson, and was off and flirting away recklessly with Miss Flossie Larkspur, who, as yet in ignorance of the brougham incident, had recovered her lively qualities as regarded the conquest of Colin, and was in no wise loth once more to respond to Colin's humour.

And then ere long Colin, with the strange restless fit upon him, had forsaken likewise Miss Flossie Larkspur, and was next seen rifling the packed-up hamper—in reality rummaging for champagne. He did not want any tea, said he fretfully. "Oh, tea be hanged!"

"If you drink any more champagne, Mr. Chepstowe," said Miss Flossie Larkspur, dancing friskily after him, "I—I declare you shall not drive me home. You shall not. It will not be safe."

The young fellow, who, by the way, had not asked the girl to drive home with him, nevertheless turned quite gaily to her, miserable as he felt, and forthwith poured out a bumper for Miss Flossie Larkspur herself.

"You must," said he coaxingly; "it will keep out the damp. Just look at the mist there yonder rising over the grass! You know that I

would not have you take cold for the world," he murmured tenderly.

Well, if she really must, if Mr. Chepstowe insisted upon it, and would not let her off—no more than a sip then! And would it really and truly prevent one from taking cold? Mr. Chepstowe was not joking, was he? etc., etc.

No wonder indeed that Lady Winterbourne was sorely perplexed, and knew not how to interpret things.

And get near to Colin privately, to seek an explanation, she could not. He was like a will-o'-the-wisp. And soon the bustle of departure, and the cheery voices accompanying it, had alike ceased; the last wheels had rolled fleetly and noiselessly away along the grassy woodland road; and the lonely forest inn was once more left to silence and solitude undisturbed, with the lurid flame-streaks, purple shadowed, in the sombre western sky, lying low behind the straggling dark building, and with grim night stealing over all.

(To be continued.)

## OLGA'S AFFLICTION.

—10:—

### CHAPTER XVIII.

NEITHER Olga nor Morgan seemed to be conscious that his hand was lying upon hers, or if they were, neither of them took notice of it. There was that in his voice that somehow warmed her, and there was a gliten in her eyes as of unshed tears as she looked into his own.

"You may say to me whatever you like," she answered, softly. "I am not afraid. You need not fear to hurt me; I am used to it. And then it is your very honesty that has made me trust you."

There was something so wistful, so pitiful in her manner of saying those words, "You need not fear to hurt me; I am used to it," that touched him in his most vulnerable point. She had not said it for effect, and he knew it. It was simply a humble admission of her terrible misfortunes which she did not expect any one to bear with, and that was all.

His heart ached for her. He drew the hand more closely within his own, and his fingers tightened around it.

"I have been brutal to you, and I wonder that you can even speak to me," he said, slowly, regretfully. "But after all, it was only for your good."

"I know that."

"And now I want to advise you if you will let me. I hardly comprehend it all myself, but I seem to understand you so much better than I did in the past. Will you forgive me, Olga, when I tell you there was a time when I was mad enough to believe that you had betrayed Stuart into loving you in order that you might persuade him into a marriage that would ruin all his life? I never knew what a fool I had been until I received the letter telling me that you really were his wife."

"I should have thought that would have confirmed your suspicions."

"No; I seemed to see it all then—all your self-sacrifice, all your generosity. I talked to Stuart of you. I told him the truth of—that."

His voice sunk to a whisper as he spoke the last word, and his eyes were fixed upon the great, flaming scar. She did not shrink from his gaze as she had once done. She seemed to have grown hard, and cold, and callous.

"And now he despises me," she whispered, hoarsely.

"I don't know," answered Morgan, after a little pause. "Ah, Olga, I wish I could be gentler with you. Neil is an idealist; you know that. He still loves you as his imagination has pictured you; he still loves the ideal. But you are not the woman to be satisfied with that; you must have the soul rather than the body. You could live upon a love that was separated from you by a thousand miles, while the contact of a body that worshipped an ideal which you did not fill



would stifle you. It would be the charnel-house of unrest to you instead of the moss-strewn couch of soul-bound waiting. Is it not true, Olga?"

"Ah, I wish I could tell you! I have never told my own heart, because I could not quite understand; and yet it seems to me that you must. My life had been so empty. There was nothing—nothing to lift it out of that hideous inanity that had fallen upon me. Even the curious glances and odious comments of the country folk had ceased to hurt me. Nothing aroused me. And then I went away. I found I could not bear the comments that people made. At the first onslaught I crept away, back to the pretty hills that had sheltered my deformity and had hidden it from the world. And then I met him."

"Yes, I remember."

"At first I shrank from him, thinking that he would despise me, as others had done; and then, with a great bound of the heart that you could never understand, I realized that he was blind. To him I was like the rest of the world; to him that terrible blight had not fallen upon my life. He smiled at the sound of my voice; he thrilled at the touch of my hand. It was like the opening of paradise to me. He was a poet, a dreamer, and in his blindness he surrounded me with all those attributes that Helen of Troy or Cleopatra must have possessed. The sensation was so new to me—to me, who had been shunned and avoided as the leper is avoided. Oh, it was so heavenly sweet! In the beginning I did not think that he would love me; I did not believe that he would fall a victim to his own imagination. But when I found that it was so, my weakness overcame me. I loved him. I clung to his belief in me as the saint clings to his religion. I never intended to marry him; I never meant that he should make that sacrifice for me. I did not propose to make him the object of pity among his friends because of the pitiable thing that he had chosen to share his life with; but when the time came to release him my strength failed. Ah, you don't know what the straw is to the drowning man!"

"Olga. Poor child!"

"And then I heard you tell him of his uncle's will. I thought I saw my way. Do you remember our conversation? You told me that if he should once look upon my face he would despise me."

"I was a despicable coward to have said it!"

"No; a coward would not have said it. You told the truth. It hurt, but I am used to that."

"And you have forgiven me?"

She looked down upon him curiously.

"Forgiven you!" she said, gently. "What was there to forgive? You were his friend, and you spoke the truth to me."

"But perhaps it was not true, Olga. Perhaps, even if Neil were to see you, he would love you. Perhaps—"

She shook her head and smiled.

"No," she said; "I know him."

"Then what are you going to do?"

"Nothing. If you promise me that you will say nothing to him of my whereabouts I will be sure that you will keep your word. I will stay on here, and he need never be any the wiser."

"But I should feel myself a cheat—a liar! He has detectives even now searching the country for you. He is raising heaven and earth to find you."

She leaned forward and looked him earnestly in the eye.

"Would silence be less cruel to him than speech would be for me? Would you hound me from the refuge that I have found? Would you make again of me a wanderer without a place to lay my head? Oh, Mr. Adeson! I am only a weak girl—weakier than the average, in that I dare to show my face to no man—helpless, ignorant, hopeless—I cannot die, for my mother's sake. Why will you not let me be?"

"Because I want to help you, Olga, and you have promised that I should do so. Listen to me, child. Neither you nor I have a right to judge Neil, and yet we have both presumed to do so. We call him an idealist, a dreamer, and yet he may not be the weak thing that we have considered him. His love may be stronger than

prejudice; he may love you more for the suffering you have endured than for the beauty which won him."

"No no! It is not true. I knew it before I ever saw you! I understood his nature even then, and every night of my life, in the silence of my own room, I bore the torture of the foreseen separation."

"And yet it may not be true," he urged. "You would not love him less if his beauty of form and face were destroyed. On the contrary, he would but become the dearer. You see how well I know you. Perhaps he is as strong as you; perhaps after the first shock he would take you to his bosom and cherish you to the last hour of his life, oblivious of what his friends might say, careless of what the world thought, content with only your great love."

"It would not be so."

"And again I say you have not the right to judge; you are his wife. Before Heaven you have promised to abide with him for better or worse, and you are breaking your pledge to heaven!"

An awful expression had come into her eyes, an expression which he could not understand. She drew her hand away from him, and clasped them both before her mouth with the palms outward, her fingers interlaced. Her head was flung back. She seemed suppressing some exclamation by physical force. She remained that way for some time, and then she dropped them heavily, and answered listlessly,—

"It was not with Heaven that my vow was registered. It was for the finite idea of justice that man has set up. It was for legal reasons. Without that he could not have secured a sou of the fortune that he has looked upon as his, during all the days of his burdened life."

"And you really think that he has used that fortune?"

She turned her eyes upon him swiftly.

"Has he not?" she asked quickly.

"How little you know of Neil after all. How little you have studied the man whom you have chosen to marry. Can you think him so mean? Can you think him so small of soul that he would do a thing like that?"

"Why not?"

"A man does not accept a sacrifice such as that from a woman. Stuart would be willing to share the fortune with you, but he will never take it from you!"

"Then it has done no good!"

The words were almost a wail.

"It has given him nothing. He has never touched a penny of it, and he never will, Olga, unless he shares that penny with his wife!"

## CHAPTER XIX.

THE wind was rising higher, the waves licking the rocks with greater fury. The noise of the breaking billows was almost deafening; but neither Morgan nor Olga heard. They were both so lost in their own thoughts that the elements were nothing to them.

And then she leaned forward and placed her hand upon his shoulder. For the first time he shrank from her, and a swift rush of colour dyed his countenance. He did not move, however, and evidently she did not see.

"What would you advise me to do?" she asked, hoarsely.

He dropped his head upon his hand and was silent for a time. It seemed to him the most difficult question that had ever been put to him in his whole life before, and much as he had thought upon the subject, he was not prepared just at once to answer it.

There was a singular feeling at work in his breast, but he no more understood it than he could have analyzed the force that was precipitating the storm.

He lifted his head at last and looked at her rather unsteadily.

"You are Neil's wife," he said slowly. "It is for him to judge. It will be hard for you, but you have borne so much that surely you can bear more. Next Wednesday the operation will be

performed that will either give Neil his sight or tell him that he must ever remain as he now is. It will be the great trial of his life, Olga, and at the great trial of a husband's life his wife's place is at his side. Go to him. Be beside him when that operation is performed. Let him feel the greatness of your love, and then let him make his own choice."

"But duty will hold him to me!" she cried passionately.

Morgan leaned toward her, and once again placed his hand upon hers.

"My dear," he said, solemnly, "Stuart could not deceive you. You would know the difference between love and duty. You would see the difference between the yearning of the soul and the yielding of the body. And then, at least, the tragedy would be played out, Olga."

"Yes, the tragedy would be played out," she repeated, dully.

"There would be no more need for concealment, no more hiding, no more burying of the whole soul in the tomb of silence. The romance would end and the commonplace begin. You could make the arrangement of dividing Dacre Hartley's fortune, which Neil will never touch until the division comes; and then—the rest is in the hands of Heaven, Olga, and if the worst comes, it can be no worse than it is now."

There was a long pause, a sigh as if the last breath were fluttering out of her tortured body, and then the girl spoke again.

"Perhaps you are right," she said, quietly.

"At least you will try it?" he asked.

"At least I will try it."

He did not reply. His hand had fallen across his knee. The wind was roaring by them. A gull, with dampened wings, flapped almost across their faces.

Suddenly Morgan glanced up. He put out his hand, and with an impulse which startled him, he passed his fingers across the scar upon Olga's cheek. She neither coloured nor drew back.

"Tell me of it," he said hoarsely.

"It was burned with acid," she answered, her tone growing a little harder.

"Acid!" he repeated, heavily.

"Yes," she answered, somehow still feeling the touch of his fingers upon it with soothing coolness, though they had long ago been removed. "It burned into my flesh then; it has burned into my heart ever since!"

"Was it an accident?"

"Yes."

"Will you tell me of it?"

"I have never told it to anyone in all my life; but I will tell it to you. I don't know why. Perhaps there is something in the storm that enables me to talk of it. It was not so long ago that it occurred, less than four years, and yet it seems four centuries of misery that have been crowded into that time. I have told you before that my mother was married, when I was quite a child, to Charles Bretherton. He had a daughter a year younger than I, a beautiful, wilful creature, more like a gipsy than anything else, heedless and headstrong, but with a warm, loving disposition, and easily duped by those whom she loved. We were brought up together, and while we were as unlike as the country and the town, we loved each other as well as any two sisters could have done. And what a care-free happy childhood it was for both of us! When I look back now, it seems to me that I could never have been that pretty, fun-loving girl who thought that the whole of life lay in the heart of a daisy or a wood-violet. You won't mind my saying that I was beautiful, will you? I speak of it now as I might of some friend whom I loved and who is dead."

She was looking out over the sea again with that curious expression in her blue eyes, and Morgan moved a trifle closer to her.

"I know that you were beautiful," he said, in a tone so low that she scarcely heard it.

"And she was beautiful also," continued Olga, as if unconscious of the interruption. "We were blonde and brunette, and Charles Bretherton was as proud of us as if he had been a king. When we were old enough we were sent away to school; but our parents continued their country life, knowing nothing else, and caring for nothing

else. To me it was perfect. I loved the fields, the wild flowers, the woods and meadows. There was poetry and romance in every blade of grass for me, and I worshipped it all; but I soon saw, that as my sister grew older she chafed under it. She hated the country. She had read the novels that the girls at school had lent her, and she longed for life as it was pictured there. I confess that the attraction even threw a glamour over me, but not sufficient to make me forget my much-loved country.

"See how beautiful we are, Olga," she used to say, dragging me before a mirror. "Is it not a shame that we should be buried in the heart of that wilderness without a chance for a romance? With never an opportunity, such as other girls have, who are not half so attractive as we?"

"In my own heart I longed for it too; but I laughed at her and turned away. It would have been so much better if I had reasoned with her, or if I had persuaded my step-father to take us to the city. But I did not. Ah! of what use is it to linger over that time. And yet you will understand why I do, when I tell you that that was the end of all our happiness.

"The grounds of our school were very charming and very large. About half a mile from the school building they sloped down to the edge of a very beautiful river that was thickly skirted by a heavy growth of trees. We were permitted to go there when we liked during the warm months, as there were no schools for young men in the vicinity, and no temptation liable to fall in the way, and I was passionately fond of it. I used to go there to study, and more than once in those last days, I found my sister coming out of the little woods as I entered, flushed and excited; but she always assured me it was from the exercise of rowing.

"But it was not. I discovered it all later. She went there to meet a man. Ah! can't you understand it? She had never had a lover, and those novels that she had read were so cruelly real. She had met him there one day by chance. He was a handsome man as devils are handsome, I think, with that dark, passionate, thrilling beauty, that brings such destruction to a young girl's heart, and nothing under the sun could have been more lovely than Natalie. I wish I could tell you of her. But of what use would it be? It could tell you nothing more than that Arthur Nelson fell madly in love with her. One morning I awakened and found her gone. She left a note telling me that it was with him she had fled, and then I discovered that he could not make her the honoured wife that he had promised because he was married already.

"I see you start and shudder; but after all, that was but a part of his villainy. He had served his time in prison for burglary, and was looked upon as one of the most desperate men in the whole country.

"And then my trial came. I dared not tell my father of the terrible thing that had occurred. He worshipped Natalie! I dared not go to him with the terrible story that had shattered even my heart, I who loved her less than he. I determined that I would find her myself. I would leave it to no one. I would save her. And then began a hunt that lasted through weeks.

"I found her at last believing herself his wife. I convinced her of the truth and took her away with me. She told me that he would follow us; that he would kill us both. She told me of the wild passion of his love for her; but I was deaf to all of it. I preferred death to the shame that had come upon her. I took her back to the school, where I had persuaded the principal to keep the truth from my father. The next day he followed us. I left her in her room and went down to see him. He demanded her, and I refused to even allow him to see her, threatening to have him arrested. He swore to have his revenge.

"He came again a few days later. It was a bitter scene. We were upon the lawn taking our exercise—Natalie and I. He had evidently been lying in wait for us. He came up and demanded that she should go with him. She was frightened, for she saw murder in his eyes as clearly as I saw it, but she refused. He

caught her by the arm. His lips did not move, but I heard him say behind them,—

"If I can not have you, no other man shall, I swear that!"

"I seemed to have the strength of a thousand devils. I caught her by the other arm and tore her from him, flinging her behind me. I had already seen the little blue bottle in his hand, and something told me what it contained. I had read in papers how men had spoiled the beauty of women who had spurned them, and I knew in that brief instant that Arthur Nelson contemplated taking that fiendish revenge upon her. But the vitriol never reached her. I can hear my own scream yet as the acid touched my face, but I remember nothing after that.

"A long illness followed. When I recovered from it I found that my father had been killed by the hand of Arthur Nelson, and my sister was the inmate of an asylum. She died six months afterwards."

She finished the telling dully, almost stupidly, and Morgan sat there looking at her, his face as white as the dead.

A drop of rain splashed upon them.

He rose, took off his coat, and placed it about her shoulders carefully.

"Come, Olga, it is raining," he said, his voice sounding somehow hard and stiff. And then he straightened himself and drew her hand through his arm.

## CHAPTER XX.

MORGAN ADESON had never experienced so peculiar an influence as that which grew over him there among the cliffs of Ashleigh. He wanted to stay there. It seemed to him that he could never weary of sitting among the rocks and watching the wild rushing of the tide.

It filled his whole being with that strange unrest that is nevertheless a pleasure—with that contradictoriness that is one of the most singular things in nature. He knew that his duty called him back to London, and yet he lingered on, filling each hour with a nameless something that he could not define, and yet which lingered with him through every remaining year of his life.

He and Olga were almost always alone together during those few days. Sometimes they would sit for hours beside the sea without a word passing between them; and then they would talk in desultory style, sometimes with animation, sometimes sadly, but always with an earnestness that he never forgot.

And, strangely enough, he always placed himself where the scar upon her cheek was most visible—where he could not lose sight of it for one moment—as he had done that night upon the balcony.

And he had grown to marvel at the way he recalled that night. There was nothing specially distinctive in it that he had to remember, and yet every word that she had spoken, every expression of her countenance, every movement of her beautiful head, were as plainly pictured upon his mental retina as they had been distinct to his vision upon that night.

Occasionally they spoke of Neil, and then their voices would assume a lower tone, as one does when a reverent subject is discussed.

"Shall you write again?" he asked her, as they sat together for the last time upon the rocks, with the sea almost licking their feet.

"I don't know," she answered, with a little sigh. "It seems to me that there is a great change coming in my life. Heaven knows whether for good or evil. That change will decide for me. I do not believe that I could write if I were happy."

"No; it is only suffering that brings soul development."

"Only suffering," she repeated, looking out toward the sea.

There was a little pause between them, then he said, dreamily:

"You will never be happy, Olga."

"No."

"You will never be happy, because your ideals are too high. You are like Stuart, in a sense, only his are placed upon beauty, perhaps because he is a poet; but yours are higher than that. You are a soul idealist, not an idealist of the body. There is not enough in life to make you happy. You are somewhat like that rushing water, Olga—restless, turbulent, susceptible of no confinement—"

"And yet the sea becomes a placid, ebbing stream under the hand of Heaven, the hand of love," she interrupted, in the same dreamy tone that he had assumed.

He stretched himself out on the rock beside her with his hands supporting his head, his eyes fixed curiously upon her profile.

"But Heaven is not love alone, but strength, force, nature, commandant, and all that is included in love. Do you think that all these attributes are included in the feeling you bear toward Stuart, Olga?"

She looked at him slowly.

"I love him," she answered, solemnly.

"Are you sure?"

"I don't think I exactly understand."

"Do you doubt?"

"Not in the way that doubt is usually expressed. I have seen you, within the few days—is it I?—that I have been here, as well, perhaps, as Heaven sees you. You have tried to conceal nothing, and yet I am puzzled. Olga, do you know what it is I fear?"

"What?"

"That it is not Neil whom you love."

"What do you mean?"

"It is his blindness, his misfortune; it is the fact that he cannot see you as you are. It is the knowledge that your marred beauty is perfection to him. Olga, when Stuart's sight is restored, will your affection for him remain the same?"

She was looking at him with open mouth, her breath coming quickly and in little gasps. Her hands were clasped closely.

For a time she sat there staring at him as if trying to decide in her own mind whether what he had said could be true or not, then she heaved a little sigh.

"No," she said, huskily. "I have suffered at the thought of losing him. I have suffered the death which dissolution cannot equal."

"Because you have lost Stuart, or because he is to receive his sight again?"

He lifted himself and leaned slightly toward her.

"Because I have lost him," she stammered.

He hesitated a moment, silently regarding her.

"I do not believe you," he said, quietly.

"He has touched you in three places. Mentally, he is congenial. He has aroused your womanly sympathy, and he is physically blind to your defects; but in the star-chamber of the heart, where the soul sits enthroned, he has never entered."

"I wish it were true, but it is not!" she cried.

"I can understand now why Natalie lost her reason when Arthur Nelson was separated from her."

"Do you realize that to-morrow will be Tuesday, Olga?"

She scarcely heard him, and her lips barely framed the monosyllable in reply,—

"Yes."

"You still agree that you will go with me to be beside your husband when that operation is performed?"

"Yes."

"That is right; at least you will have done your duty. But oh, Olga, I wish I could prepare you for what will happen! If you love him as you say, and he should shrink from you—"

She smiled into his eyes.

"I have been disciplined through suffering," she answered. "I can bear it when one shrinks from me; I am used to it. I did not flinch when you shrank back from me in horror."

"But you do not love me."

"No," she said slowly, "I do not love you."

There was another little silence between them, then suddenly he rose and held out his hand to her.



"Come!" he said, curtly.  
 "Where?" she asked.  
 "Home—anywhere! The roll of the surf makes me nervous to-day. I shall never see this place again as long as I live!"

She looked up at him curiously.  
 "And yet you have liked it," she said simply.  
 "Yes," he answered; "I have liked it."  
 She gave him her hand, and he assisted her to arise and step over the boulders. She paused and laughed slightly as he took great care to lift her over one that was especially high.

"It seems so strange," she said, by way of explanation, "to have one take so much trouble for me."

"Why?" he asked.  
 "Because no one ever did until I met Neil, and even then it was I who took care of him."

They did not speak again until they were at the top of the cliff, then he stood there with her at his side and looked down.

"Do you see that huge brown boulder there, just above the one upon the water?" he asked, pointing toward it.

"Yes."  
 "You were sitting there the day I came. I stood here and watched you. Your hands were about your knees, your eyes upon a gull that was sailing above the water. I wonder if I shall ever see you like that again, Olga!"

"I hope not," she answered.  
 He looked at her swiftly, and then walked rapidly toward the little house half surrounded by trees, upon the side of the hill.

It was separated from the near cut by an old-fashioned stile with the lower step gone. As he reached it he turned suddenly, and, without warning, took her in his strong arms and lifted her over.

His face flushed passionately as he set her down upon the other side.

"You have never forgiven me for my cruelty to you when we first met," he said almost savagely, "and you never will; but I told you the truth. You may take that as another affront, if you will; but I can't help it."

"I don't think I exactly understand," she said curiously. "Have I offended you?"

"No," he exclaimed, coldly. "I have no right to be offended. You know at what hour the train leaves to-morrow. Please be ready."

## CHAPTER XXI.

MORGAN ADESON was heartily ashamed of his ill-temper on the following day, more especially as he could remember nothing whatever that had aroused it, go over the situation and conversation as he would; and yet he knew that for more than an hour he had wandered about the hills of Ashleigh in a worse humour than he almost ever was in his life before.

"It is only that the girl arouses everything that is bad in me," he told himself, biting his lip savagely. "I wish that neither I nor Stuart had ever seen her! And, having seen her, I wish that some accident would happen, no matter what, that would take her out of our lives! Of course it is only for his sake that I have taken this singular dislike to her; but that is bad enough. Confound it all! what devilish misfortune ever sent her, with her hideously deformed face, into our lives? I half wish I had never interested myself in the matter at all. I wholly wish that I had been in some other business when I made myself so officious as to take him the news of his uncle's death down there in the country. I think I should feel as if I had lived down some terrible nightmare, if I were sure that I should never see her again as long as I live!"

And, nevertheless, he was nervous when she did not appear at breakfast the following morning—nervous and ill at ease, talking with her mother in a fitful sort of way that told more plainly than words that something was mentally distressing him.

"I hope Miss Bretherton is quite well this morning?" he said at last, unable to bear the suspense, and yet not knowing the reason of his own anxiety.

"She is not quite well," answered her mother. "She has a severe headache."

His face clouded as he glanced up quickly, but he controlled the exclamation of sympathy that arose to his lips.

"What a fool I am!" he ejaculated mentally. "Why do I always feel this absurd sympathy for everything that affects her?"

Aloud he exclaimed, almost coldly,—

"Indeed I trust it is nothing that will cause her to postpone her visit to London!"

"Oh, no! She will be ready in time for the train."

"Then kindly say to her that I will meet her there."

He hurried through his breakfast in silence, said *au revoir* to his hostess, and went out, assuring her that he preferred to walk to the station in order that he might see the beautiful country again before he left.

Then it was that shame overtook him, and it was in a most contrite mood that he met Olga at the station.

"Is your head better?" he asked, as he took her from the little rickety carriage.

"Not much," she answered, dully. "I did not sleep last night."

"Why?" he asked, looking at her intently, and trying to see through the thick veil that covered her face.

"Perhaps because of the trial that lies before me," she replied, wearily.

"Poor little girl!" he muttered, drawing her hand through his arm, and leading her to the other side of the station platform. "It is hard upon you—terribly hard! But you are brave, and you will face it nobly. I want to apologise to you, Miss Bretherton, for my rudeness last evening. There was absolutely no excuse for it."

"I thought that I had offended you in some unconscious way," she said, humbly.

"No! it is only that I am a brute, and that I cannot always control my fiendish temper."

"Then you were angry?"

"Yes; that is—no. I was in a nasty, cantankerous humour, at what I could not tell you for the life of me. Will you forgive me?"

"Yes," she answered, simply, "because I believe that in spite of all your temper and your cruelty, you are my friend."

He looked down at her with a curious smile in his eyes, and drew her small hand a trifle closer beneath his arm. But she did not observe apparently, for she continued in the same tone, though there was a slight tremor in her voice,—

"I have not friends enough to sacrifice them for small reasons."

"You make me more ashamed of myself than I ever was in my life before."

"I don't mean to do that. Perhaps I should like you less if you were less blunt."

"Then you do like me, Olga?"

"Why, yes! Are you not Neil Stuart's friend?"

He bit his lip and turned away, one might almost have said, sulkily. At the same moment the train came round a bend in the road and he dropped her arm, turning away to pick up a valise, as he said, coldly,—

"There is the train."

He placed her in a vacant seat when they had entered the compartment; then, with the excuse of desiring a cigar, he left her and entered the smoker.

"Thank Heaven, we are out of Ashleigh!" he exclaimed, mentally, as he flung himself into a seat and savagely bit the end off his cigar. "I wonder when in all my life I have ever passed a more uncomfortable four days!"

He did not pause to consider why he had remained there for four days. It did not occur to him that no one had insisted upon his remaining, or, for the matter of that, had even asked him. He forgot to recall the fact that the hours he had passed in bed had seemed to him the only ones that had been wasted, and that he arose much earlier than usual in order that none of that time in the country should be unavailing.

He did not enter the compartment where Olga was again until they were nearing London, and then he sat down wearily beside her.

"Have you any preference in the matter of hotels?" he asked.

"No," she answered. "I don't know London at all."

"When do you wish to see Stuart?"

He asked the question so suddenly that it was almost brutal, and he saw her lean back against the window-casing and close her eyes as if a sudden faintness had oppressed her.

She did not reply at once, and when she did her voice was neither as strong nor as steady as usual.

"Whenever he desires it," she said, slowly.

Morgan looked grimly out of the window.

"Then," he said, hesitatingly, "you expect to—to take your position as—as his wife?"

She started up and turned towards him with ill-suppressed excitement.

"My position as his wife!" she repeated, huskily. "No! Morgan, no!"

Her own vehemence made a singular impression upon her. Morgan's face flushed. Perhaps it was that which recalled her to herself, for she too coloured and turned her eyes toward the window. Her excitement had vanished, and there was a great weariness in her tone as she continued:

"That is, not until his sight has been restored—not until he has seen me as I am—not until I am convinced that his affection for me is great enough for him to see beyond the scar that disfigures my face, and I know that it is I whom he loves and not an imagined beauty. And, Mr. Adeson, that I never will know!"

She had turned to him again, and impelled by some impulse, he could not tell what, he leaned toward her.

His face was still flushed, his eyes held a curious light, and his voice had never sounded so low, so almost tender, as he said, slowly:

"Then you do not believe that a man could love you, notwithstanding your impaired beauty?"

"No. I do not believe there is a person in this world so unselfish as to forget the repulsive."

"Then you think that life holds no prospect of love for you?"

"I know that it does not. I have experienced the nearest approach to it that I shall ever know—the idealised love of a blind man. I do not regret the past, even though there is to be no future. I do not even regret the marriage into which I persuaded Neil Stuart, because it gives him his birthright; and I do not believe that he is the man, whatever the weaknesses of his poetical nature may be, to ever have married another girl after his sight had been restored."

"I believe you are right," said Morgan, thoughtfully.

"Then there is no particular harm done. I am no worse off than I was before, and he has his inheritance."

"And you can look upon it like that?"

She gazed at him for a moment in silence, then said calmly,—

"A curious change has come over me, Mr. Adeson. I think I have fallen in love with the work that my life has forced upon me. A week ago life was a burden to me, and but for my mother I should have ended it all by a leap from those cliffs upon which you have stood at Ashleigh. I had not the right to desert her. Perhaps, after all, it is only the little natural excitement that is at work in my veins; but life has altered in some subtle way."

His eyes glowed. He leaned towards her, but she had thrown her head back against the window-casing again, and was looking out at the rapidly vanishing trees. He was about to speak, but her voice interrupted him, as she said musingly, more to herself than her listener,—

"It may be because, in spite of myself, I am to see Neil again so soon."

He drew back suddenly, and did not speak again until they had arrived at the station in London.

## CHAPTER XXII.

"Is it you, Morgan? I have looked for a telegram from you every hour during the last two days. I felt sure that you would not get back, and was about to send a messenger to old

Selby, that I would have that operation postponed. I did not have the courage to go on with it until your return."

Morgan shook his friend's hand with the warmth of a most sincere affection, and sat down with something of an elaborate sigh.

"It has been an infernally trying time, and no end a bore," he said, believing honestly that he spoke the truth.

"And you found your author?"

"Yes."

"And you have engaged him?"

Morgan started up suddenly and sat very erect in his chair. He was silent for a moment, then said, in a tone which would bear no description:

"I know you will think me a lunatic, Stuart, but the solemn truth is that I forgot all about it!"

"Forgot all about what?"

Morgan's business."

"What are you talking about, old man? I shall think you a lunatic in reality soon. Was it not to engage the author of 'Graves' that you went up into the country?"

"Yes."

"And you found him?"

"Yes."

"And then you forgot what you had gone for?"

"It seems that I did, for certainly I never mentioned the subject after I got there."

"But how could that be possible?"

"I don't know; I can't think for the life of me; but the truth remains the same that I entirely forgot Morris and his business until you mentioned it two minutes ago or less."

"But—I don't understand. What could have caused it?"

"I don't know—unless it was that the identity of the author of 'Graves' put every other thought out of my head."

"The identity of the author?" repeated Neil, wonderingly.

"Yes. It was a woman, not a man."

"Some one you know?"

"Yes."

There was a pause, a pause filled with suppressed excitement on both sides, for Neil's cheeks had grown crimson; then Morgan said, slowly,—

"And some one—you know, Neil."

"Who?"

The monosyllable was not more than a whisper, but Morgan heard it.

"Can't you guess?" he asked, slowly, leaning forward and laying his hand upon his friend's knee.

"Not—Olga!" he whispered.

"Yes."

The silence was impressive. Neil sat for a time straight as an arrow, his blind eyes fixed upon Morgan's face, his own countenance grown grey as ashes; then he sunk back with a sigh, and covered his face with his hands for a moment. He dropped them at last and asked, hoarsely,—

"Where is she?"

"At the — Hotel."

"Here—in town?"

"Yes; I brought her with me. I thought that it would be your will."

"And she consented to come?"

There was something in the tone that fired Morgan's inflammable temper, though he could not have told what, and he cried out, hotly,—

"Yes; she came because I told her that it was her duty to come; she came because I made her see that her place was beside you during the trial that is to come into your life to-morrow; but, more than all, she came because I informed her that you were sufficiently a man to refuse the fortune which her grandfather left, unless it was shared with her, half and half at least. She submitted herself to this torture in order that you might be kept no longer out of the money which she has already sacrificed so much to give you."

"Submitted to torture! What torture?"

"That of showing herself in public."

Neil shivered and shrank back.

"Is it so bad, then?" he asked, huskily.

"Yes," exclaimed Morgan, coldly. "It is so bad that nothing under the heavens could be worse. Don't deceive yourself in any way; don't imagine that it will not be so bad when you can look upon it yourself. The first thing that your eyes will rest upon when your sight is restored will be her face. For mercy's sake, be prepared, in order that you may not hurt her by any exclamation or outcry of horror. Remember what you will see, and be prepared for it. Heaven knows, she has suffered enough."

He was surprised at his own vehemence, but he told himself that he had spoken more strongly than he felt in order that he might spare her.

Neil was silent for a time. His hands stroked each other nervously, and once or twice his lips opened as if to speak, then closed again; but at last, as if unable to control himself longer, he cried out, fiercely,—

"It may be weak, Morgan, it may be wicked, but I pray to Heaven the operation will fail! I pray to Heaven that I may never look upon the ruined beauty of the woman whom I have loved! I would rather go through life in the condition that I am than that. I have not the courage—I have not the courage! We were so happy down there in the country when I did not know the truth. Ah! you don't know, and you can't understand, for you have never loved; but it was the ideal heaven. I lived years in those weeks, and yet they seemed like moments. She was so gentle, so sweet, so soothing in her influence, so congenial in her mental qualities, so like the precious spring that comes so late and endures so short a while. If this operation should fail, Morgan, we could go back there, she and I, to that country that we both learned to love because it gave us to each other. Her voice would soothe me into forgetfulness, and I should cease to remember the—the defect upon her. I would forget the blight upon her, and we would be happy again, as we were—before you came."

Morgan shrank back as if he had received a terrible blow. His face whitened, and for a moment he sat staring at his friend in dumb horror; then, in a tone which sounded singularly unlike his own, he said,—

"And you—connect me with—with your present unhappiness, Neil?"

"No, no; don't misunderstand me, old friend."

"I have done only what I believed to be my duty," Morgan went on, as if he had not heard. "It was at her request that I told you the truth of the misfortune that has befallen her. I impressed the truth of it upon you only in order to spare her pain when the test came. If your love is what it should be—if it is what a girl like Olga Bretherton deserves—then you will not love her the less after the first shock is over. But for her sake I have not the right to allow you to deceive yourself, and I will not. If this operation should fail, and you should retire to the country, there would not be an hour in the day, when you were alone with her, that your fingers would not stray to the scar that caressed her cheek. Your kiss would fall upon it, instead of upon the lips that were raised for it. Your—Oh, Stuart! I wish that I did not know you so well; but I do—I do! It would seem less horrible to you if your natural eye could rest upon it, than you are picturing it in your brain now as I speak to you. You may think of me what you like, you may say of me what you will, but I have only done that which I believe to be right."

"You have never done anything else in your life, Morgan!" exclaimed Neil, putting out his hand and earnestly grasping that of his friend. "Your conscience would not let you do anything else. I have not greater faith in my own mother than in you, old friend, nor could I have greater love for a brother. Whatever happens, or whatever has happened, I know that you have only acted as you believed to be right."

Morgan rose. He walked once or twice up and down the room, his brows knit in a heavy frown; then he laid his hand upon Neil's shoulder, and said, with a calmness that was entirely assumed,—

"Your wife is waiting for you. Do you wish to see her now, or not until—to-morrow?"

Neil hesitated a moment, then arose slowly.

He seemed to have grown years older in those few minutes.

"I will go now," he said, huskily.

Morgan made no comment, and they left the room together. He took Neil to the sitting-room that he had provided for Olga; but before he knocked upon the door, he paused, and laying his hand upon his friend's arm, he said, quietly,—

"Take care, Stuart. Remember that she loves you, and don't make it harder for her than you can help. She obtained her scar as a warrior does, in a noble service for others, and she should be honoured for it, not ordered from association with humanity as if she were a leper. Be as gentle as you can, old man, and Heaven bless you both!"

He knocked upon the door, and then, as he heard Olga's sweet voice bid him enter, he opened the door, saw Neil step inside, then closed it and withdrew.

(To be continued).

## A CHANGE OF FORTUNE.

—10—

We are four girls, Mina, Audrey, Guelder, and Eustachia. Oddly enough, we are not the least bit like our names, for Mina is the most cheerful, jolly sort of a body; Audrey is the dark one and Guelder the beauty; while I am nothing at all like the stately, imposing maiden one would naturally expect to see in Eustachia Glenmore.

We are orphans, and our sole possessions consist of a small house and garden in a humdrum village, a few silver spoons, one beautiful old cabinet of solid mahogany, a string of gold beads descended to us from our great-grandmother, and ourselves. All the rest—our father's books and our mother's jewels—went little by little to buy our bread and butter while we were growing from babies to young women.

For three or four years now we have been taking care of ourselves: Mina with her pen—she writes the most beautiful tales; Audrey with her music pupils in a neighbouring city; Guelder as a typewriter in the same busy place, and I keeping the old home in order and making many of the girls' clothes. We all like good times and pretty things, and sometimes can't help wishing we could have more of them. But, on the whole, we jog along very contentedly, trying to keep sweet-tempered and serene, as our precious mother always did even in the darkest hours.

One morning, not long ago, soon after Audrey and Guelder had come home for a vacation, we sat together in our cool, pleasant sitting-room. For a wonder, we were not all talking at the moment that a thundering knock was given on the front door. We jumped as guilty as though we had been caught stealing jam, and I went to see who had come. A tall countryman stood before me on the porch.

"Good mornin', ma'am," he said, at the same time extending a letter. "Old Colonel Ponsonby, over at Rushville, ast me to give ye this as I was a-passin'." I reckon this is the Glenmore's place, ma'am!"

"Yes. Thank you," I said, staring at the letter and then at him.

He made an awkward attempt at a bow and went off to his waggon.

I came back to the sitting-room, holding the thick yellow envelope up for my sisters to see.

"Only think, girls, it is from Grandfather Ponsonby!"

Now our Grandfather Ponsonby was a very peculiar personage. For a great many years he had lived on the other side of the world, and had written to our mother very seldom. A few months after her death, he came home to West-view, the old family homestead, about ten miles down the railroad from our village. He came over to see us twice a year, usually bringing a present of fruit. At Christmas-time he always sent us a pound a-piece. Once we were invited to spend a week with him. We enjoyed the picturesque, rambling farmhouse, the portraits, the quaint furniture and all the special nooks our mother had told us of in our childish days passed in a distant town, but we could not enjoy our



new-found grandfather. Whether he had lived too long in some heathenish country where they don't have civilized girls; whether his conscience reproached him for his neglect of his daughter; whether for some other reason we did not know; but he seemed just as ill at ease with us as we felt with him. Some way we could not be ourselves with the little dark-skinned, white-haired old gentleman, whose keen, black eyes shone from under his bushy brows as brilliantly as the wonderful gem flashed upon his shirt front.

Our Grandfather Ponsonby was reputed to be fabulously rich, but everybody said that Edgar Morton was to be his heir. The Morton estate joined Westview, and the two families were distantly related. Edgar's father, who had married and died away off in a foreign land, was grandfather's partner, and we had heard that grandfather had adopted Edgar. We all liked the genial, handsome fellow, who came often to see us, but we suspected, from sundry sharp speeches our grandfather made now and then, that he was not pleased with the intimacy growing up between "Cousin Edgar" and "those Glenmore girls."

Such was the state of things between our relatives and ourselves when the unexpected letter made its appearance.

"Who is it for?" asked Guelder, forgetting her grammar.

I turned the blank envelope towards her.

"No address!" she cried. "How queer! But then it comes from a queer man."

"Hush, Guelder!" reproved Mina, who, as the eldest, had taken the letter from me and was tearing it open. "Who knows but he has sent us a hundred pounds."

"No danger," murmured Guelder, as Mina began to read aloud,—

"DEAR SIS,—

"I want you to come over next Thursday, the 18th, by the 4.15 train. I am going to make my will. We must arrange about Edgar and 'Sweetheart,' too. Bring one of the others with you."

"EUSTACE PONSONBY."

A sheeted ghost arising from beneath the floor and sitting solemnly in our midst could scarcely have created more of a sensation than this epistle. What could it possibly mean? It was an open secret among us that Audrey and Edgar Morton were very fond of each other. Did grandfather know this, too, and was he about to bestow his blessing upon them and to ask our advice in making his will? Such unaccustomed thoughts as these were too great for our poor brains. We sat there dazed, staring at each other helplessly.

At length Mina asked faintly,—

"Girls, which of us is 'Sis'?"

We looked round at one another as though we were going to see the magic letters appear upon the brow of the chosen one. Then with one accord we turned our eyes toward Guelder.

She was, as I have said, our beauty. We had always longed to dress her in the soft silks, the rare laces, the gleaming jewels, that would have set off her exquisite face so perfectly. She seemed lovelier than ever to us at this moment when we all felt sure that it was she whom our grandfather had chosen for his heiress. After a short silence, Mina spoke the thought of three of our minds.

"You are the one, Guelder. Three cheers for Grandfather Ponsonby."

As soon as she could be heard, Guelder cried, "All or none, girls."

And then we all began talking at once like a lot of chattering blackbirds.

Our excited discussion resulted in the decision that Mina, as the eldest, and Guelder, as our unanimous choice, should go down to Rushville on Thursday afternoon. This settled, I began to wonder what our mother's rightful share in the Morton property had been. I inquired of Mina.

"I hav'n't an idea. But you know mamma's grandmother was a Morton, and there must have been something."

"Possibly," said Audrey. "Eustachia, dear, suppose you bring out the family archives."

"Eustachia dear," sped away, returning presently with a small japanned box, which contained

our deeds, insurance papers, receipts, and a bundle of thin, blue documents bequeathed to us from a remote ancestry. We searched thoroughly among them, but no light was thrown on the mystery of our share of the Morton property.

Thursday morning dawned bright and clear. At the breakfast table Guelder announced that she was going to array herself in all the collective finery of the whole Glenmore brood.

"We must let grandfather see that we understand the use of money."

"But," I remonstrated, looking around the room, "you cannot wear mahogany furniture nor silver spoons, and those constitute our entire stock of treasures."

"You forget that old trunk of Aunt Rachel's cast-off gowns. You just wait till you see me ready to start."

"I," said Mina, "am going to wear the worst rags I can find, so as to let him see how much we need some money."

A burst of laughter greeted this very practical resolve.

In ample time for the four-fifteen train, the girls emerged from their respective rooms. Mina looked sweet enough to kiss in a clean cambric frock, with a coarse hat tied down under her plump chin in a big blue bow and a white muslin kerchief crossed upon her bosom. A conspicuous and beautiful darn on the outside of one sleeve betokened poverty and skill with the needle happily combined.

We were still admiring her, when the rustle of silk fell upon our wondering ears, and Guelder sailed into the room. We held our breath as we gazed on this radiant vision.

Her slender figure was arrayed in a close-fitting dress of dark-red silk, most becoming to her brunette beauty. It was simply made, but the rich material fell in soft folds, and the creases of time were deftly concealed by stitches here and there. A lace shawl, old-fashioned but handsome, was draped artistically about her shoulders.

Upon her head was a small bonnet of the prevailing mode, copied from the last fashion-paper, and concocted from she only knew what scraps of ribbons and feathers. Her own best long tan gloves, our one string of gold beads, and a lace parasol, evolved from my sunshade, and a lot of black tulle, completed this truly artistic and stylish attire.

We all approved them to our hearts' content, and they started off in high spirits. I went, too, presently, down to the vicarage, where I had an appointment with Mrs. Grant, leaving Audrey at home alone. We had none of us said much to her about the unexpected good news concerning Edgar Morton and herself in grandfather's note.

We felt, somehow, that she would rather have a good talk with Edgar first. But we were all just as happy over it as we could be, and I could not help giving her a very tell-tale kiss of gladness when I left her. She put her arms around my neck and hid her face on my shoulder for an instant.

"Isn't it lovely of grandfather?" she whispered. The vicarage is half a mile down the street from our home, and I was walking leisurely along the shady pathway, when I heard someone calling me. I looked round, and to my intense astonishment there sat grandfather Ponsonby in his dog-cart.

"Come, get in here, Tommie," he commanded, peremptorily.

He always called me Tommie for some reason known only to himself.

I obeyed, outwardly composed, but inwardly in a tumult of wonderment. As we went rolling swiftly along behind his high-stepping bay, he asked,—

"Did that blunderhead of a John Winter bring a letter to your house last Monday?"

"Yes, sir," I replied.

"Where is it?"

"In the upper drawer of Audrey's desk."

"Did you read it?"

"Why, of course, we read it," was my rather surprised answer to this strange question.

"Humph! Do you always read other people's letters, you girls?"

"I don't know what you mean, grandfather. It was not 'other people's' letters. The man

asked plainly if this were not the Glenmore's place and said you told him to give the letter to us."

"Oh, well, John Winter was never known to do an errand right. But I should think you could have read Richard Green's name on the envelope," and he chuckled as if he had said something funny.

"There was no name on the envelope. There was nothing at all on the outside, but as it began 'Dear Sis,' on the inside, we supposed it was for one of us," I said, in as dignified a way as I could. He turned around and gave me a piercing glance from his keen eyes.

"How is that, miss? No address and beginning 'Dear Sis'! That is no letter of mine."

"It is signed 'Eustace Ponsonby,'" I remarked demurely.

He made no reply to this but drove directly to our house.

"Go bring me that letter, Tommie," he said briefly, as we reached the gate.

I rushed in for it, only stopping to give Audrey a convulsive squeeze by way of an outlet to my feelings.

Grandfather gazed rather blankly at the envelope, then opened the letter. At this he squinted with a puzzled look for a minute or two. Then his face cleared.

"That is not 'Dear Sis,' at all, Tommie, but 'Dear Sir,' as plain as the nose on your face, and I should think anybody but a parcel of silly girls might have known that the letter was for a lawyer, and that 'Sweetheart' is the name of a silver mine. I happened to meet Richard Green in town this morning, and found he had not received my message, so I suspected that John had made one of his usual blunders; but I didn't think that you simpletons were so fast for my money as—"

He never finished that sentence, for I interrupted him hotly. You can imagine, perhaps, how my indignation had been rising during his remarks. To think of those two dear girls on their way to Rushville; of their chagrin, disappointment and mortification at being so duped; and of our sweet Audrey, whose hopes had been raised so high, only to be dashed to the ground. And then to have him hint that we were so fast for his money! I just could not stand it another minute. The next thing I knew, I was looking him straight in the eye with burning cheeks and beating heart, and speaking very fast.

"Grandfather," I said, "you are not fair. We don't want your money at all nor anything connected with it. And it is not our fault that you did not write plainly and forget to address the letter, nor that Mina and Guelder have gone over to your house, nor that poor Audrey has been so happy about Edgar Morton. We took your letter for just what it said, and I am not going to have my sisters blamed for it."

He had turned red and then white during my little speech, and I was frightened myself at my boldness. But I was not going to let him see it. I held my head up very high, and looked as brave as I could, when I had finished. To my amazement, after a minute he began to laugh.

"You are a real little Ponsonby, Tommie. I shall have to call you Eustachia in the future. Not one of your sisters would dare to talk to me in this high and mighty fashion, I'll be bound!"

He laughed again, loud and long.

"So Mina and Guelder have gone over to help me make my will, and Audrey thinks I've given her and Edgar Morton my blessing, and you are scolding your poor old grandfather like a school-boy, all because I don't write a good fist and forget to put any name on an envelope. Don't you think you are rather hard on a lonely old man, Tommie?"

I could hardly believe my ears when I heard the tone of this last question. We had always thought of our grandfather as queer and sharp-tongued; but that he could be lonely in his fine home, or that he was growing old and feeble had never occurred to us. In spite of myself, I felt the tears coming into my eyes as I looked into his wrinkled face and thought of the many long years since his daughter had left the old homestead. I forgot that he had been hard to our mother; that he had neglected us; that he often behaved in such a strange fashion. I saw only

an old man who needed some one of his woman-kind to love him and to care for him. But I did not speak of this new emotion which had filled my heart. I could not. Perhaps it was not necessary that my lips should express my thoughts. My face has always been called a tell-tale one, and grandfather's eyes were very keen. He leaned forward from the dog-cart and laid his hand for a moment upon mine.

"God bless you, Tommie," he said; then drove quickly away.

When the girls came home and I had told them all about it, we had first a good cry and then a good laugh. And we decided to go over and see our grandfather the next week and to try and be more friendly with him. But he was more prompt than we. The very afternoon following the girls' fruitless trip to Rushville, he came to see us. That was in June. Now it is the First of August, and we are all living at Westview, as happy as we can be. The day of good times and pretty things has come to us. Miss writes more charming stories than ever, Audrey and Edgar are to be married at Christmas time, Guelder is grandfather's amanuensis, and there is no danger of any more mistakes in his letters; while I am housekeeper for him and, he often says, heart-keeper, too.

Ever since that memorable day, when I spoke my mind to him for the first time and the last time, too, in such a way, he has shown us a side of his nature that we never knew before; and we all love him dearly. Once in a while, when he feels particularly good-humoured, he asks us if we don't want to help him make his will.

## FACETIÆ.

HE: "Will you give me one kiss?" SHE: "If I let you have one will you be satisfied?" HE: "Never!" SHE: "Then take it."

HE: "I beg your pardon, but I never can get your name." SHE (naively): "No? Then possibly I might get yours."

NEW GIRL: "What does your papa like for breakfast?" LITTLE MABEL: "He always likes most anything that we hasn't got."

"Yer reverence is like a mile-post," said a bold grumbling Wicklow peasant, "for ye always points to a road ye niver goes."

SCRIBBLER: "I wonder if I'd have better success with the magazines if I should have my articles type-written?" FRANK FRIEND: "Mercy, no! Then the editors could read them."

MRS BREENTHERE: "Well, my dear, marriage at the best is but a lottery." MISS YELLOWLEAF (eagerly): "You don't happen to know where tickets can be bought, do you?"

COOLING: "Why did you speak to that howlid tramp, old fel?" GILLEY: "Why shouldn't I, chappie? He isn't in twade, and he doesn't work faw a living."

"You may speak," said a fond mother, "about people having strength of mind; but when it comes to strength of don't mind, my son William surpasses any one I ever knew."

BELLE: "I don't know what you see in Mr. Colin Wood to marry him for. He hasn't a gleam of sense." MAUDE: "No, but his father keeps a coal yard."

DAUGHTER: "Mamma, what is a parvenue?" MAMMA: "Really, daughter, I don't know. It's something or other, though, that never had a grandmother."

AT BRIGHTON. "That is a beautiful medal Smith has." "Yes; that's for beating a bicycle record." "What is his record?" "Run over seventeen people in a week."

"CAN you tell me why so many school-teachers are single?" "Yes; the fellows are afraid to propose because they cannot pop the question grammatically."

"BOYS," he excitedly cried, as he rushed frantically among them, "I tell you I had a close shave just now!" "Where at?" they gasped. "At my barber's," was the response.

PENELOPE (sighing): "Ah, the men are not what they used to be." TOM BARRY: "I'd like to know why not?" PENELOPE: "They used to be boys, you know."

AT the whist table. "Speaking of good hands, I held one last night that was worth a cool twenty thousand to me." "You don't say so! What was it?" "Miss Bullion's down on the pier."

KINGSLEY: "Don't you think it retards digestion to read a newspaper at mealtimes?" BINGO: "On the contrary, I find it a great help. When my wife makes a failure of the breakfast I devour the paper."

TWO men were speaking the other day about the theatre, when one said to the other: "By the way, Briggs, do you say parkey or parket?" "Well," said Briggs, "to tell the truth, I generally say family circle."

"WHERE is the watch your mother gave you?" asked Pauline of Claude, as she vainly looked for the chain as her head rested fondly on his waistcoat. "It's still in the family, dear," responded Claude; and then Pauline knew that the watch was still with his "uncle."

SAID a gentleman to his coachman: "I am going to make you a handsome present. I give you all you have stolen from me during the past year." "Thank you, sir," retorted the coachman, "and may all your friends and acquaintances treat you as liberally."

JACK POTTS: "I am sorry, aunt, that you feel so tired, for this Japanese section is most interesting. Won't you let me get you a jimrikisha?" AUNT BRACER: "Well, perhaps 't would make me feel a little bit better; but don't have it made too strong."

"DON'T I get a tip?" asked the barber, after he had finished cutting the tall man's hair. "What for?" asked the tall man. "Why, for taking such good care of you. Gentlemen generally give me something." "Well, so will I," said the tall man, as he took his tally. "You may keep the hair."

HE (crossly): "Why do you always contradict me?" SHE (humbly): "I don't want to, dear." HE: "You do it just the same, and I don't want it to occur again." SHE: "Yes, dear." Several hours later—He (after some oversight): "Well, I'm the biggest fool in town." SHE: "Yes, dear."

MISS GUSHINGTON: "Why don't you follow Ruskin's suggestion and write a novel which doesn't stop at the marriage of a couple, but goes on with their history?" OLD bachelor author: "No use; no publisher would print it." "Why not?" "Oh, the publishers nowadays insist that every novel must end pleasantly."

MR. YOUNG POP: "I'll be cook myself, my dear, but d— me if I'll set foot in a registry office again. I picked out the most respectable-looking woman in the room, and, stepping up to her, said: 'Can you fill the position of cook?' She looked like our bantam fighting-cock as she replied: 'I am here to try to fill that of our coachman. I think you would suit admirably.'"

JACK: "I have a chance to marry a poor girl whom I love, or a rich woman whom I do not love. What would you advise?" GEORGE: "Love is the salt of life, my friend. Without it all else is naught. Love, pure love, makes poverty wealth, pain a joy, earth a heaven." JACK: "Enough. I will marry the poor girl whom I love." GEORGE: "Bravely spoken! By the way, would you—er—mind introducing me to the rich woman whom you do not love?"

A WEST-END druggist is bemoaning the loss of a customer. A lady was in the shop on Saturday, and had a prescription filled. "How much is it?" "Half-a-crown." "Dear me, two shillings is all I have with me. Cannot you let me have it for that?" "Really, I could not," said he of the pills, "but you can pay the next time you are in." "Oh, but suppose I should die?" laughingly inquired the lady. "It would be a small loss," replied the druggist, but he saw from behind the injured look the customer wore as she crept out of the door that he had made a mistake somewhere, but it did not dawn upon him until too late.

FOR two hours the fashionable lady kept the draper exhibiting his goods, and at the end of that period she sweetly asked, "Are you quite sure you have shown me everything you have?" "No, madam," said the draper, with an insinuating smile, "I have yet an old account in my ledger which I shall very gladly show you."

"TOMMY, how did you get the back of your neck all sunburnt?" "Pullin' weeds in the garden." "But your hair is all wet, my son." "That's perspiration." "Your vest is on wrong side out, too." "Put it on that way a-purpose." "And how does it happen, Tommy, dear, that you have got Jakey Du Bois's trousers on?" (After a long pause) "Mother, I cannot tell a lie. I've been a-swimmin'."

JONES (facetiously): "Just back from your fishing-trip, Jamesby? Well, proceed with the fish-stories." JAMESBY: "All right. The fish were very plentiful where I was—" JONES (more facetiously): "As usual." JAMESBY: "I fished every day for three weeks, eight hours a day, and didn't catch a fish, didn't get a bite, didn't get a nibble, didn't see so much as a minnow all the time I was there, and—" [Jones faints.]

"WELL, how do you like going to school, Wendelline?" inquired her mother. "The intellectual discipline pleases me very much, mamma," replied the dear little girl, who had just returned home after her first day at school, "but the methods are somewhat crude, and the teacher impresses me as one who has not wholly succeeded as yet in the struggle to overcome the disadvantages necessarily resulting from defective early education."

A CANDID and well-meaning professor, who had witnessed the performance of a little play in a private house, in which his hostess had taken the leading part, met the lady as she came from behind the curtain. "Madam," he said, rushing up to her, "you played excellently; the part fits you to perfection." "Oh no, professor," said the lady modestly; "a young and pretty woman is needed for that part." "But, madam," persisted the professor, "you have positively proved the contrary."

"LOOK at that dark man across by the punch-bowl," said one lady to another at an assemblage of newspaper men; "he has taken twelve glasses of punch, one after another!" "Ah, indeed!" said the other drily; "that is my husband." But the woman was born to tact and luck. "Is it possible? Let me congratulate you, lucky woman, for having a husband able to drink twelve glasses of punch without growing tipsy. Why, if my husband drinks two, he gets simply roaring. You fortunate thing, how I envy you!"

SOME years ago a well-known Indian painter was travelling in Montana. He went to the breakfast-table in a mountain hotel, and sat waiting for some one to take his order. Suddenly he felt a jar and then a heavy weight resting on his shoulders. He looked around, and found leaning upon and over him a huge, bearded man, in a broad-brimmed hat, and with two revolvers sticking conspicuously in his belt. "Well, old feller, what'll ye have?" said the man. "Who are you?" asked the artist, in a tone of dismay. "Me?" said the man; "I'm the waiter."

"AND how is Moike, Mrs. Herlihy?" inquired one of that lady's neighbours. "Pore b'y, phwat does the docthor say to his loongs?" "He says there's niver a thing the matter wid Moike's loongs now," replied Mrs. Herlihy, "but he ain't denying they've got the last mite of a tindyney." "Wurra, wurra, an' is that so?" exclaimed the neighbour, dolefully; and then, after a short pause, she asked deferentially, "An' phwat is a tindyney, Mrs. Herlihy, dear?" "A tindyney," responded Mrs. Herlihy, with solemnity, "is a thing that ain't to be spoken av lightly. It's where what ain't so a'ready is loikely to come on ye unbeknownst at any minut!" "Pore Moike, pore b'y!" ejaculated the visitor with a dubious shake of her head, and she departed to spread the news of Moike's mysterious ailment.



## SOCIETY.

THE King of Italy eats only one meal a day.

THE accouchement of the Crown Princess of Roumania (Princess Marie of Edinburgh) is expected to take place in November.

THE Duke and Duchess of Fife are coming south for the season shortly, and intend to spend the early part of the winter in Norfolk.

THE Prince of Wales has fixed Monday, November 20, as the day when he will lay the foundation stone of the St. Bride's Technical Institute, in Bride-lane, Fleet-street.

LITTLE Queen Wilhelmina of Holland has lately entered her fourteenth year. Her mother, the Queen-Regent, gave her on this occasion twenty little wooden figures dressed in the various uniforms of the Dutch army, so that the Queen may learn in playing to know them, and to recognise the different arms and rank of each.

THE Princess of Wales is very fond of her nephew the Czarewitch, and he much resembles the Duke of York, than whom he is considerably taller. The Empress of Russia is very devoted to her eldest son, and is very anxious that he should make a love match, and be very happy in his married life. It is a curious fact that the present Emperor's elder brother, to whom the Empress was at first betrothed, bore a strong likeness to the late Duke of Clarence and Avondale.

THE Empress Frederick is to stay at the Hotel Bristol until the middle of December, when she will return to Germany on a visit to her second daughter, Princess Victoria of Schaumburg-Lippe, whose first accouchement is expected to take place at Bonn early in January. The Empress has not visited Berlin since the beginning of February, and she apparently has no intention of returning there next winter, for, according to present arrangements, she will come to England when she leaves Bonn, on a visit to the Queen at Osborne and at Windsor Castle.

THERE are now three English Princes who hold honorary colonelcies in the Austro-Hungarian army. The latest and youngest recipient of this compliment is the Duke of Connaught, upon whom the honorary rank of Colonel of the 4th Regiment of Hungarian Hussars was conferred by the Emperor Franz Josef on the occasion of the Duke's visit to Güns, to be present at the Hungarian manoeuvres.

It is expected that Princess Beatrice will unveil the statue of the Queen at Aberdeen which is composed mineralogically of mica-felspar and quartz in distinct crystals. The granite which represents Majesty is supposed to be derived by degradation from pre-existing rocks, then stratified and subsequently altered and consolidated, mainly by prolonged action of water and pressure, combined with a very moderate degree of heat.

THE Queen, who is excellently well just now, will probably not come south until the end of the third week in November. One of her Majesty's personal interests will then be the progress made at Frogmore, which is being prepared for the permanent use of Prince and Princess Henry of Battenberg and their family, as they are rather outgrowing the accommodation at the Castle, and, moreover, the Prince and Princess are anxious, not unnaturally, to have a place which they can call their very own. The pond, which has been, we imagine, the cause of the rather unhealthy dampness which has hitherto been associated with Frogmore, has been filled up, and the house itself, with its thirty acres or so of lovely gardens, should be an ideal residence in the summer months. Frogmore has been a Royal residence since the time of good Queen Charlotte. The late Duke of Clarence was born there, and it was for several years the home of Prince and Princess Christian.

PRINCESS MAY, Duchess of York utterly refuses to pinch in her waist, and it measures the more or less reasonable number of twenty-four inches, and her figure is one of the loveliest in England.

## STATISTICS.

THERE are said to be ten thousand American actors.

LONDON has one-eighth of the population of Great Britain.

In a single season a female codfish will lay 45,000,000 eggs.

THE TOWER BRIDGE, now nearing completion, will have cost £800,000. In its construction there have been used 24,000,000 bricks, 415,000 tons of granite, and nearly 16,000 tons of iron and steel.

THE population of France in its entirety consumes 23 gallons of wine per head. The annual consumption in the United Kingdom is less than half a gallon per head—viz., 14,000,000 gallons, as against 825,000,000 gallons.

## GEMS.

THE greater our dread of crosses, the more necessary they are for us.

A GENEROUS man will place the benefits he confers beneath his feet, those he receives nearest his heart.

WHERE a book raises your spirit and inspires you with noble and courageous feelings, seek for no other rule to judge the event by; it is good, and made by a good workman.

ARMIES, though always the supporters and tools of absolute power for the time being, are always the destroyers of it too, by frequently changing the hands in which they think proper to lodge it.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

BAKED CHICKEN.—An appetizing way to cook chicken is to cut it in pieces, as if for a fricassee. Dip the pieces in beaten egg and then in fine bread crumbs. Season with salt, pepper, and minced parsley. Put them in the dripping pan with bits of butter over them, and a little water in the pan. Bake slowly until they are done. Put the chicken upon a hot dish, make a rich gravy of the contents of the pan and pour over them. Garnish the dish with parsley.

IRISH MOSS.—One ounce of Irish moss, one pint of milk, one tablespoonful of sugar; soak the moss for a few hours, pour in one breakfast cupful of water, then put it on to boil with the milk, and stir till it boils for about twenty minutes, till it is all dissolved; strain it through coarse muslin, and put in the sugar and put it in a shape, it will be a firm jelly when cold. It is a vegetable gelatine, and is a good remedy for coughs and colds, and chest and lung complaints.

BLACK PUDDINGS.—Some skins, four breakfast cups of blood, one large teacup of milk, half pound of suet, half pound of oatmeal, a little mint powdered up, one large teaspoonful of salt, half a teaspoonful of black pepper, one teaspoonful of allspice. Strain the blood, add the suet finely chopped, the meal, the salt, pepper, spice, and mint, and milk warmed. Fill the skins three-quarter full and tie up. Put in boiling water, prick with a large needle, boil gently for twenty minutes.

GRAPE JELLY.—Wash the grapes and free them from the stems. Put them in the kettle, and mash them until all are broken. Heat slowly, and cook until the juice is well drawn out. Then place a square of cheese cloth over a colander, and set the colander over a bowl. Turn in the grapes, and let them drip without any pressure. Measure the juice, and allow an equal measure of sugar. If wild grapes are used, allow a little more than an equal portion of sugar. Boil the juice fifteen minutes. Skim and strain again, then add the sugar, and boil until the surface looks wrinkled, and the liquid jellies on the edge. Skim well, and turn into glasses.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

TAILLESS cats, with purple eyes, are common in Siam.

BUSHMEN and negroes possess a more prominent and narrow chest than the white races, whose chest is broader and flatter.

So dense is the water in the deepest parts of the ocean that an iron-clad, if it were to sink, would never reach the bottom.

THIERS, the historian of the French Revolution and afterward President of France, was the son of a bookmender.

THE Emperor of Russia prefers to have his sister styled her Royal and Imperial Highness the Duchess of Edinburgh. The German title is not used in Russia.

In Austrian society it is the custom to take a partner for only one round of a dance. By this means ladies and gentlemen change partners five or six times in a single dance.

At ancient British feasts each guest had his portion placed before him in a little wicker basket. The most honoured or noble guest had the biggest piece, and taking it in his hands, tore it between his teeth.

At Cotta, in Saxony, the names of persons who did not pay their taxes last year are printed and hung up in all the restaurants and saloons in the city. The proprietors dare not serve those mentioned on the lists with food or drink.

THE power of trees to regulate their own temperature to a certain extent is seen in the fact that their twigs are not frozen through in winter, nor does their temperature increase in summer in proportion to the surrounding atmosphere.

MANY old houses in Holland have a special door which is never open save on two occasions, when there is a marriage or a death in the family. The bride and groom enter by this door; it is then nailed or barred up until a death occurs, when it is opened and the body is removed by this exit.

THE Grand Duke Alexis of Russia is a passionate collector of all kinds of old curiosities. The Prince is charmed if he can get hold of an antique piece of jewellery, and seeks them with ardour. He possesses in his palace of St. Petersburg a lady's dress of silver gilt, made by the celebrated Parisian jeweller, Thomas Germain, in 1792.

It is considered a very healthful thing to eat an orange before breakfast. But one must go to Spain to see that done well. The senorita cuts off the rind with her silver knife; then, putting her fork into the peeled fruit, she detaches every morsel with her pearly teeth, and continues to eat the orange without losing a drop of the juice, and lays down the core with the fork still in it.

THE mother of the Khedive of Egypt has recently had a splendid toilet service made for the Egyptian Monarch, in which are twenty-seven pieces all mounted in eighteen carat gold, richly chased, each article bearing a brilliant diamond monogram, with the initials of the Khedive "A.F." Twelve hundred diamonds have been employed in the service, which is enclosed in a grand ebony dressing case, the property of the late Khedive. The service comprises all articles required for toilet use, even to a moustache waxer.

As far back as the sixteenth century the ballet was in existence in Italy, the court of Turin in that day making special use of it, and the royal family and nobles taking part in it. The ballet was first introduced in France in the reign of Louis XIII., and both that monarch and Louis XVI. occasionally took part in its dances. In its earliest presentation the ballet appeared dexterously combined with the other theatrical acts, and is said to have "completed the chaotic medley exhibited in these spectacles, which were at once mythological, allegorical, fantastic, warlike and pastoral. About the year 1700 women made their first appearance in the ballet, which up to that time had been performed exclusively by men, as was the case also with plays and operas; but no woman ballet dancer of any note appeared until 1790, or about a century ago.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

ROGER.—It is a trade secret.  
 DICK.—Quite impossible to say.  
 P. R.—He was a celebrated actor.  
 R. Y.—The person who called him in.  
 M. N.—We have not seen such a book.  
 GEOFFREY.—We should say quite impossible.  
 NESSIE.—Light blue is becoming to a pure blonde.  
 JIM.—The first map of the moon was made in 1647.  
 D. A.—Cannot understand what you want to know.  
 AGNES.—Navy blue or dark olive should be very becoming.

OLGA BREXTHERTON.—Your china silk will be very pretty.

NERVOUS NORA.—You must get a physician to examine you carefully.

A CHEEKY CHAP.—We cannot comply with your request.

INQUIRER.—The population in Ireland in 1881 was 5,174,836.

HUGO.—There is no escape from imprisonment if he is found.

CONSTANT READER.—He lived in the reign of Queen Elizabeth.

FALCONER.—Very little coal is found in Ireland; mainly in south and west of country.

ERIN C.—You should consult a lawyer before taking any proceedings.

TOMMY A.—A soldier does not get his uniform with him when he is discharged.

PATRICIA.—Only a picture dealer could give you any idea of the value of your paintings.

A VERY OLD READER.—It would be more simple and less costly to apply at once to a first-class optician.

HALBERT.—The stipends of the archbishops and bishops are paid by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners.

AN OLD SUBSCRIBER.—Old coins have no standard value; their worth is what they fetch at a public sale.

JACK'S PET.—Hot water applied to the back of the neck will relieve nervous fatigue.

L. E.—We cannot undertake to furnish information about commercial firms in this column.

MATTIE.—Carbonate of soda is used not only for Scotch scones, but also by some for cat-cake.

CURIOUS ONE.—If the widow is executor of her husband's estate, she may sue for debts owing to him.

TOT.—At night rub a little glycerine and lemon juice over the hands, and draw on a pair of old kid gloves.

WINNIE.—They may be dipped in gum-water, but when so treated are very difficult to iron.

DARRELL.—It would rest with the court to decide, after hearing the evidence on both sides.

M. Y.—The whole of the borough is now in Staffordshire, the boundaries having been altered in 1890.

MARINE.—We should advise you to apply to your nearest post-office, where full particulars can generally be obtained.

TROUBLED ONE.—He cannot be reapprehended on same charge, no matter what new evidence may be forthcoming.

DUNSTAN.—The distance from London to Bombay, by way of the Suez Canal is 6,240 miles; and by way of the Cape about 10,600 miles.

DISTRESSED MOTHER.—Make the child speak very slowly and utter every word distinctly. There is no other way.

DERMOD.—A man may by will bequeath his property to any member or members of his family, to the exclusion of the others.

ALEXIS.—Imprisonment for contempt of court by not obeying an order to pay a debt does not discharge the debt.

ALDY.—Fourpenny pieces ceased from being issued from the Mint for general circulation in 1866; they were gradually called in.

AUBREY.—The average weight of the brain of a European is of a man, 49 to 50 ounces; of a woman, 44 to 45 ounces.

AUGUSTA.—The surgeon who performed the operation is the best—if not the only—person to give you the information you ask for.

CICELY.—Try bathing your throat and chest with cold water. It is very likely to strengthen and keep you more free from cold. Wear woollen materials next you.

CLARA.—It is said that half a teaspoonful of sugar will revive a dying fire; and unlike kerosene, it is absolutely safe.

PATERFAMILIAS.—Parents are not liable for windows broken by their children; but the child may be summoned, and, if old enough, may be fined.

A CONSTANT READER.—Have nothing whatever to do with such men. They are quacks, and that of the very worst kind. Better by far consult a doctor at once, and thus save time and money.

RODNEY.—In the absence of agreement to the contrary a yearly tenancy is assumed with six months' notice on either side.

LUKE R.—Apply to the Excise authorities in the first instance, and they will direct you how to apply to the licensing magistrates.

POOR SARAH ANNE.—You must have your eyesight tested by an oculist, so that you may have the glasses necessary to adjust your want of vision.

AGATHA.—We should advise you to get good copies, and practise from them for an hour daily for about a month.

POOR ELOISE.—We do not think that the fact you mention is alone sufficient ground for breaking off the engagement.

A. SENDEN.—If the indentures specify wages to be paid weekly, the employer must pay, although he does not keep the apprentice at work.

## CUPID'S SPOIL.

CUPID is looking out for victims  
 As he hides himself from sight,  
 Hides himself among the flowers,  
 Seeking spoil this moonlit night.

Surely 'tis a beautiful garden,  
 Full of plants and flowers rare;  
 Crystal fountains, rustic bowers,  
 Everything to make it fair.

Cupid peeps from out his covert,  
 And a victim fair he sees  
 Through the flowers clustering round him,  
 Gently swaying in the breeze.

Just the purest, sweetest maiden,  
 Hatless, robed in virgin white,  
 Loosened hair of wondrous beauty  
 Bathed in Luna's golden light.

"That's the target," chuckles Cupid,  
 "I am looking for, I ween!"  
 So he sharpens well his arrows,  
 Making sure their points are keen.

Down the pathway comes the maiden,  
 Singing as she trips along;  
 Cupid lends an ear attentive  
 To the burden of her song:

"What care I though he should leave me?  
 What care I, oh, what care I?  
 Thinks he that the thought will grieve me?  
 What care I, oh, what care I?"

"Though he says that he adores me,  
 What care I, oh, what care I?  
 For my love though he implores me,  
 What care I, oh, what care I?"

Suddenly is heard a footfall,  
 And she gives a frightened start,  
 Cupid aims a shining arrow  
 Straightway at the maiden's heart.

Knows she not who stands before her,  
 Drinking in her every grace?  
 Vainly seeking for some token  
 As he stoops to scan her face?

"Though you bade me leave you, sweetheart,  
 Never to return again,  
 Go I cannot till you whisper  
 Just one word to ease my pain."

Look! are those the evening dewdrops  
 Glistening on her glowing cheeks,  
 Or are they at last the token  
 That so earnestly he seeks?

Nearer still he leans toward her  
 And she utters just one word,  
 While the love song in the distance  
 Of a nightingale is heard.

Cupid's evening task is ended!  
 So he leaves the happy pair,  
 Cupid cannot long be idle  
 He must seek for spoil elsewhere.

M. H. G.

ISIDORA.—Not knowing what the stains are caused by, or whether the colour is light or dark, we are unable to advise.

TROUBLED HILDA.—Our inference from what you state is that an operation is now necessary; we urge you to see a competent medical man without delay.

DOUBTFUL ELLIOTT.—Have not another word to say to the lender who begins by asking a fee; it is the only money which will pass between the parties.

H. I. J.—The husband may be summoned by the guardians at any time, if they believe him to be in a position to contribute to his wife's maintenance.

BASIL.—If the performance is a stage play, and money is in any way taken for admission, a license for the schoolroom must be obtained from the magistrates.

ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—"Paul Preaching at Athens" is one of the famous cartoons by Raphael, from which it is said, the tapestries in the Vatican at Rome were executed.

JOAN.—Scatter salt over soot when it falls upon a carpet. The soot will adhere to the salt when brushed up lightly and leave the carpet perfectly clean.

MAURICE.—In the absence of agreement the term of notice would depend upon the custom of the occupation. We cannot say what that is.

INQUIRITIVE.—Cholera is conveyed from India to the Mediterranean by way of the Red Sea. The very fatal forms of the disease are commonly called Asiatic.

DACRE.—The antlers or horns of the males are full grown in the middle of summer, and remain until January, when they drop off and new ones begin to grow.

S. A. M.—We are very sorry we cannot help you; we realise the difficulty of the problem much as you do yourself. Glad to know the READER is so much appreciated.

IGNORAMUS.—"Spondulix" is a slang name for money, it had its origin in the Greek word spondulios, a shell, shells of that species being once used as money, both in Greece and Egypt.

MAURA.—Speak to him when next you meet and let the acquaintance come about in a gradual way. When you become friendly, if you ever do, you can make whatever explanation you see fit.

CARRIE.—To dress well is simply to be arrayed in colours that blend with the complexion and give tone to the habiliments which though fashionably made are strictly in keeping with a modest bearing.

MINNA.—You do not give any particulars of size or figure, therefore it is impossible to give even the most general directions. Indeed, the only way is to study your own peculiarities and try what is most becoming.

ANXIOUS ONE.—1. You are suffering, we should say, from extreme nervousness. Take plenty of outdoor exercise, and get a good chemist to prescribe you a tonic. Try also and overcome the tendency yourself. 2. The name of the author is Ouida.

SCOTT.—A man having "tholed an assize" or stood his trial for any crime in Scotland and been dismissed with a verdict of not proven cannot be again apprehended and retried for same crime, even though further evidence of his guilt should be obtained.

MARMION.—All new slaughter-houses have to be licensed, and all old ones have to be registered under a penalty; and it is in the power of the local governing authority to license or register according to their discretion.

MYRIE.—It is scarcely ever, if indeed it is ever at all, right for a young girl to "keep company with" a young man contrary to the wishes of her parents. The parents, in all probability, are wiser than she is in such matters.

OLIVIA.—If ink is spilled on a carpet or woollen tablecloth, put on immediately a thick layer of common salt. When this has absorbed all the ink possible, scrape off with a spoon and apply more. Keep doing this until all the ink has been taken up.

WORRIED META.—Get a box of Keating's insect powder and dust it into all the lurking places of the beetles, or make a paste with two-thirds oatmeal, one third white or red lead (dry), and as much treacle as necessary to make stiff dough; put that where the beetles can get at it.

PHYLLIS.—Teeth which have been very much neglected and are very much discoloured, may be effectually cleaned with powdered charcoal; but as soon as the fur is removed from them, should be discontinued, and nothing but soap and water should be used, as charcoal is apt to scratch.

LOUIS.—The House of Lords consists of six princes of the blood, two archbishops, 21 dukes, 23 marquises, 116 earls, 25 viscounts, 24 bishops, 299 barons, 16 Scottish representative peers elected for each Parliament, and 28 Irish representative peers elected for life. In all, the House of Lords numbers 559 members. There are six ladies peeresses in their own right, and who, if the law allowed have a right to sit.

MINYA.—There is really no remedy for it, and the attempt so often made to cover the supposed defect with dye is not advisable, as most dyes contain metal, which is apt to affect the head itself injuriously; it frequently happens that a young lad who has gone grey regains his lost colour later on; so do not quite despair; after all, the objection to grey is a mere prejudice; it cannot indicate age as long as there are no wrinkles or "crow's toes" on the face to bear it company.

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